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IRIS.

VOL. I.

NEW AND POPULAR NOVELS

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3 vols.

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IT IS NO WONDER: A STORY OF BOHEMIAN LIFE. By
FITZGERALD MOLLOY. 3 vols.

HURST & BLACKETT, 13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

IRIS

BY

MRS. RANDOLPH

AUTHOR OF

“GENTIANELLA,” “WILD HYACINTH,”

“LITTLE PANSY,” “RESEDA,”

ETC. ETC.

“Prouder than blue Iris.”

Troilus and Cressida, A. I, Sc. 3.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1882.

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TO

MAY STEUART

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I R I S .

CHAPTER I.

Take sound advice, proceeding from the heart
Sincerely yours, and free from fraudulent art.

DRYDEN.

THE cathedral town of Bannerton was situated nearly in the centre of Coalshire. On one side of the town, and stretching for miles in that direction, nothing was to be seen but scored earth, tall chimneys, huge, ungainly buildings used as founderies and manufactories, and gaping pit-mouths surrounded by complicated machinery; while at night a constant lurid glare pervaded the whole region. This

was the new side of the town, for not more than twenty years had passed since coal had been discovered in the immediate vicinity of Bannerton, but that period had been amply long enough to convert the peaceful, somewhat sleepy cathedral city into one of the most bustling manufacturing centres of England. But the old, or cathedral side of the city had remained in appearance very much as it was before ; there was a curiously distinct line to be perceived by the observant between the old town and the new. Old Bannerton was a grey old town with tiled roofs beautified with weather-stains and lichens, while many of the better class of the inhabitants lived in large houses standing back from the street, and surrounded by fine, old-fashioned gardens where fruit and flowers grew in harmony together, and the “ bedding out ” system was a thing, if not absolutely unknown, still regarded as an innovation, and as a weak following of the fashions of the staring villas which had risen with mushroom-like rapidity on the new side of the town.

New Bannerton had been run up as required with all the rapidity and the stereotyped ugliness of modern builders. Staring rows of red brick houses presented a marked contrast to the dark grey stone of the old town, and the pretentious villas, whether single or semi-detached, were but poor substitutes for the substantial and comfortable houses at which the new-comers sneered as old-fashioned. Old Bannerton, with its fine cathedral and two churches, had known but little of dissent, though one modest chapel had always existed. In New Bannerton dissent was rampant, and chapels of all sorts of denominations sprang up in every direction.

The social division was to the full as strongly accentuated as the material. The old inhabitants were inclined to ignore the new, and to regard such of their body as entered into social relations with them as in some sort traitors to their order. The new-comers, chiefly wealthy manufacturers, laughed at the quiet, old-world ways of the earlier inhabitants, but they were secretly nettled at finding themselves quietly

ostracised, and would have given a very great deal to have been received by the cathedral and county set. Barracks had been built when the city began to assume such large proportions, for an outbreak among some colliers on strike had once required to be quelled by the military, and ever after a cavalry regiment had been quartered there. The officers formed an occasional link between the old town and the new. Some of them were sure to be acquainted with, or to have introductions to, the county gentry or the magnates of the Close, while they were by no means disposed to decline the hospitality eagerly offered by the rich inhabitants of the fine new villas; and so, when they gave their winter balls or their summer picnics, lawn-tennis or strawberry-parties, the representatives of the two divisions of Bannerton were sure to meet on neutral ground.

The country on the cathedral side of Banner-ton was as widely different from that on the other side as were the two divisions of the town from each other. The northern side belonged almost entirely to the Earl of Beechmont, who,

being already very rich, was, strange to relate, by no means anxious to become richer, and turned a deaf ear to all the tempting proposals to double his income by the royalties offered for the privilege of working coal-mines on his estate, while he equally refused to grant building leases. His agent and his lawyers were in despair; it seemed to them little short of flying in the face of a beneficent Providence to refuse such magnificent offers as were being constantly made to him; more especially as the earl lived almost entirely in London and at another seat, Pinefield, in Firshire, and rarely, if ever, visited his Coalshire property of Beechmont. It could not therefore signify to him, in an æsthetic point of view, whether the northern side of Bannerton became as scarred with coal-shafts and as murky with smoke as was the southern, and this was constantly represented to him by his men of business; but he stood firm, and his advisers shook their heads and agreed that, on this point at least, their ordinarily shrewd and clear-headed employer was "quite daft."

Those who lived in the town thanked him

cordially. The northern portion of Coalshire was exceedingly pretty, and it would, they thought, have been a sad pity to shroud it in smoke like the southern division. The river Banner, a beautiful, silvery stream edged with bulrushes and flags, and starred with water-lilies above the town, became, below it, a dingy, murky ditch, with banks of clay and slag, and with dirty wharves, alongside which lay innumerable coal-barges. Pursuing the course of the river upwards, the scenery, at first somewhat tame though very rich and fertile, became more and more picturesque, till the fountain head was reached among the beautiful Rockshire hills. About three miles above the town the Banner flowed through the fine grounds of Beechmont, which, when the family was away, as was generally the case, were thrown open to the townsfolk, under certain restrictions, on two days in every week.

Just opposite the great gates, which were situated about two miles from Bannerton, there stood by the side of the road a small, grey, stone house, known as the Gate House. From

the road its appearance was not very prepossessing. The door opened on to the road, as if the house had stood in a street, and the lower windows were of frosted glass, to evade the possible curiosity of the casual passers-by. It looked as if it had been intended for the residence of the Beechmont agent, and the former occupant of that position had at one time resided there; but the present agent had a wife and daughter, who considered the Gate House dull and too far from the society of Bannerton; he therefore occupied one of the earl's honsees in the old part of the town, and the Gate House, after remaining empty for a considerable time, was now let to a widow lady, Mrs. Pleydell. Uninviting as the aspect of the house might be on the side towards the road, the scene was quite changed when, the square hall with its oak well staircase passed, the visitor issued through a short passage on to the terrace on the other side. The house stood high enough above the river to allow of three terraces, from the lowest of which some fine turf sloped gently to the stream. Fine shrubs dot-

ted the lawn, rhododendrons and azaleas grew in profusion, and the walls of the house and those between the terraces were so covered with creepers that at no season of the year were they absolutely devoid of beauty. The view from the windows was pretty; the garden in the foreground, and then the winding of the river among the Beechmont woods, with rich meadows and fine trees, the whole backed by the beautiful Rockshire hills. The interior of the house was somewhat old-fashioned. Deeply-recessed windows were furnished with broad, low seats, which formed such charming lounges as almost to repay the inmates for the loss of light consequent on the great thickness of the walls; and all the rooms were panelled and ceiled with dark oak, which in the drawing and dining-rooms was very elaborately carved, the chimney-pieces in particular being extremely beautiful. Altogether the house seemed far too good for an agent's residence, and it was always said that it had been intended for the Dower House of the Countesses of Beechmont, but that, two or three of those ladies having pre-

ferred the possession of the family mansion in St. James's Square instead, the Gate House had been diverted from its original purpose.

Its present occupant, Mrs. Pleydell, had been twice a widow. The daughter of the Hon. Terence O'Shane, a son of Lord Terenure, she had in her youth been a very great beauty. She had been brought out very young in Dublin, and had married there, when little more than eighteen, Captain Netherleigh, who was aide-de-camp to the Lord-Lieutenant. The marriage was vehemently opposed by the families on both sides, for Captain Netherleigh's fortune was small, and Miss O'Shane had none whatsoever. But the young people were obstinate, and at length a reluctant consent was obtained, interest was used by which a staff appointment in India was found for Captain Netherleigh, and all the letters received from the young couple proclaimed their excessive happiness. But it did not last very long. After about six years in India, Captain Netherleigh died of cholera, and his widow returned to England with her only surviving child, Iris,

then about two years old. Captain Netherleigh had saved every shilling that was possible, and had left everything to his wife, but her means were still very narrow, and she did not find herself enthusiastically welcomed either by her own family or by his. Her father and mother were dead, her two sisters, both younger than herself, had married far from brilliantly, and were too absorbed in their own difficulties to think much of the sister they had almost forgotten; and her brother, poor and with a large family, dreaded lest she should apply to him for assistance.

If the little Iris had been a boy, Mrs. Arthur Netherleigh would at once have found herself a person of great importance in her husband's family, as his elder brother had died only a few weeks after him, and her son would have been the heir. But her two boys had died in India, the succession passed to the third brother, Charles Netherleigh, and Mrs. Arthur found herself uncared for by any of the family, excepting an old aunt, her husband's godmother, who took a fancy to the "poor, pretty young

thing," and showed her unvarying kindness.

It was while paying a visit to old Miss Rachel Netherleigh at Warwick, that Mrs. Arthur Netherleigh made acquaintance with Mr. Pleydell. He was a quiet, elderly man, of very retiring manners, the sleeping partner in a large business house, and reputed to be very well off. He was at once attracted by the pretty young widow, and when, with many tears at having to give him pain, she told him that she could never love again, he went boldly to Miss Rachel and implored her to plead his cause. Under ordinary circumstances the old lady's class prejudices, which were excessively strong, would have caused her to disapprove vehemently of the union of anyone connected with the Netherleighs with a man in trade. But she rather liked Mr. Pleydell; he was quiet and gentlemanlike, and always deferential to her. Then "poor little Grace," as she called her niece, was evidently a gentle, helpless creature, who required to be taken care of and petted, and not left to make her own way in

the world on slender means; it would be an excellent thing for her to marry this steady, respectable man, who could make her so comfortable. So she graciously promised Mr. Pleydell her assistance, and between the two Mrs. Arthur's resistance was overcome, and she at length gave a somewhat reluctant consent; stipulating that Mr. Pleydell must distinctly understand that, though she respected and liked him extremely, she had really no love to give. He replied that he perfectly understood her, that he was quite satisfied, and that he would trust to time to produce a warmer feeling.

At the first announcement of the engagement the Netherleigh family rose in arms, and addressed some very impertinent remonstrances to Mrs. Arthur. Miss Rachel, who had regarded her niece as a pretty, soft, yielding creature, incapable of taking care of herself, was astonished and delighted at the spirit which she displayed.

"I really do not see," said Grace, as she read one of Lady Netherleigh's angry letters, in which she was peremptorily bidden to cancel her

“deplorable engagement, which would disgrace the whole family.” “I do not see that I owe any allegiance to the Netherleighs, excepting to you, dear Aunt Rachel. When I came home sad and lonely they took no notice of me, they never asked me to Netherleigh, though they might have guessed how I should have liked to see the home of which my darling Arthur was so fond; and though they did ask me to luncheon once in London, Lady Netherleigh never came to see me, though you would have thought Arthur’s mother would have cared to see his child.”

“Lady Netherleigh never cared for anyone but herself,” said her sister-in-law.

“And now, when some one has learnt to care for me, is anxious to make me happy, and shield me and my child from care, these people who have never cared to see or be kind to me, even for my darling Arthur’s sake, write to command me to reject what is offered me. Aunt Rachel, you do not think I am bound to obey?”

“Obey! My dear Grace, if you thought of doing so I—you would not be the woman I

take you for. Go your own way, dear, make a worthy man happy, as you cannot fail to do, and forget that Lady Netherleigh exists. The world is wide enough for you both, and your paths need never clash."

Grace took Miss Netherleigh's advice. She wrote firmly but very respectfully to Lady Netherleigh, announcing her adherence to her intention of marrying Mr. Pleydell so soon as two years should have elapsed since her husband's death. To this epistle no reply was vouchsafed, but Lady Netherleigh wrote very violently to Miss Rachel, wondering how she could encourage anything so scandalous, so derogatory to the family dignity, and saying that of course Mrs. Arthur must clearly understand that, if she persisted in her intention, the family could take no further notice of her—she must expect to be dropped entirely.

"I should have thought one must have been taken up before one could be dropped," said Grace, when she read the letter; and Aunt Rachel was so delighted with the idea that she could not resist repeating it in her answer to

her sister-in-law, thereby greatly inflaming Lady Netherleigh's wrath. To be disobeyed was bad enough, for a Netherleigh to become the step-daughter of a "tradesman" (as she chose to call Mr. Pleydell) was worse, but that the threat of being dropped and ever hereafter ignored should be received with calmness, nay, even with mirth, was absolutely intolerable. After that sentence in Aunt Rachel's letter had been read, there was no hope of Mrs. Arthur Netherleigh's being ever forgiven by her mother-in-law.

After the expiration of her two years of widowhood, Mrs. Arthur Netherleigh was quietly married to Mr. Pleydell from Aunt Rachel's little house at Warwick, and, after a wedding tour in Switzerland, during which Iris, then a child of four, was left with her great aunt, they settled in Mr. Pleydell's house in Eaton Place. Though she could not feel for him the love which she had lavished on her first husband, and which no woman can experience more than once, Grace soon grew extremely attached to Mr. Pleydell. If she had not she would indeed

have been hard to please, for he absolutely worshipped her, and was almost as fond of Iris as of the child born the year after their marriage and christened Eve. Year after year passed without a cloud, until one evening, when they had been married about seven years, Mr. Pleydell returned home just before dinner in a manifest state of perturbation. Miss Rachel Netherleigh and his youngest brother Ralph Pleydell dined with them that night, and during the meal he rarely spoke and ate absolutely nothing, though his wife observed that he drank considerably more wine than usual.

As soon as the servants had left the room he turned to his wife.

“Grace, listen to me, and do not forget what I am about to say. If I live it is my fixed intention to withdraw my whole fortune from the business and to invest it in the funds. In my will I have left every shilling I possess to you. If I die before I have time to do this, I lay my commands upon you to carry out my wishes. Do you understand?”

“But, my dear Henry, why——”

"Never mind why," in an excited manner very unusual with him; "promise to do as I say."

"Yes, yes, Henry, of course I will."

"I have made you my executor," continued Mr. Pleydell, turning to his brother, and speaking rapidly and in a curiously thick, indistinct voice. "You have heard what I have said to Grace, remember that my wishes are carried out."

"Of course, of course, Henry, but, bless me, why——"

"Never mind, I tell you!" still more excitedly. "Miss Pleydell, I beg pardon for speaking about business before you, but you are a witness to what I have said."

"Certainly, Mr. Pleydell; I am sure everyone will be anxious to carry out your wishes. But you seem tired to-night; don't you think you ought to rest?"

"Yes, Henry," said his wife, rising and going round to him; "I am sure you are not well. Do come upstairs and lie on the sofa."

"Dear Grace, dearest wife!" he said, in a

curiously muffled, far-off-sounding voice, putting his hand lovingly on her arm; and then, striving to rise, he fell back in his chair stricken by paralysis. Medical aid was immediately summoned, but it was of no avail; Mr. Pleydell lingered for only two days, and died without recovering the power of speech. The doctors pronounced him to be perfectly unconscious, but this his wife did not believe: she was sure he knew quite well when she was beside him, and never left his side till all was over.

When, after the funeral, business matters came to be discussed, Mr. William Pleydell, the head of the firm, was furious at the bare suggestion of the money belonging to his late brother being withdrawn from the business. It was fortunate for the widow that her husband's instructions had not been confided to her alone, or she might have been overpowered and have experienced considerable difficulty in obeying them. Even as it was it gave her great pain; she wished very cordially that her husband had not laid his commands upon her, but, having promised, she felt that she was power-

less; his wishes must be carried out. Aunt Rachel was privately very thankful. In her secret heart she believed that, on the day of his seizure, Mr. Pleydell had made some discovery respecting his brother's mode of conducting business, and that this had led to the excitement which caused his death. It was dishonesty, or at any rate sharp practice that she suspected rather than impending bankruptcy. If that had been what he feared, and it had proceeded from misfortune and not from fraud, his first thought would not have been to save his own fortune, but to save the firm. However, she kept these thoughts to herself, and only used her influence to prevent Grace feeling too unhappy at her brother-in-law's annoyance.

Finding that remonstrance was of no avail, Mr. William Pleydell at length submitted with a bad grace. His lawyer carried out the arrangements, and Miss Netherleigh always suspected that that fact, and Ralph Pleydell's ignorance of business matters, accounted for Mr. Pleydell's fortune being so much less than she had supposed it to be. However, all seemed

right; Mrs. Pleydell was very well off, and Aunt Rachel did not consider it her duty to arouse any suspicions in her mind.

After her affairs were settled, Mrs. Pleydell determined to sell the house in Eaton Place, and live in the country—at any rate, for the present. She had fairly well enjoyed London life, and had entered a great deal into society, but she felt that, even when her period of mourning was over, going out alone would be very different from what she had hitherto enjoyed. Besides, Iris, who was now eleven, and tall of her age, was somewhat delicate, and country air would be good for her. So Mrs. Pleydell decided on removal, and after many expeditions to see country houses that appeared charming in advertisements, and proved odious on inspection, finally took a lease of the Gate House for seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years. She did all she could to persuade Aunt Rachel to come and live with her, but Miss Netherleigh would not hear of it.

“No, my dear,” she said; “every woman should be the mistress of her own house. If I

lived with you, I am so used to managing, and you are so yielding, that it would be virtually my house, and not yours, and that would be bad both for you and the children. But the lease of my cottage near Warwick expires next year, and then, if you like, I will establish myself near you in Bannerton. There are some nice old-fashioned houses near the Close that would suit me very well."

The old red brick house in Bannerton soon became quite a feature in the society of the place. Miss Netherleigh was a clever woman and had seen a great deal of the world; she was not only a good talker herself, but had the still rarer gift of making others show themselves at their best. All the dignitaries of the Close held her in high esteem, and her Thursday afternoons were pleasant objects for a drive for many of the county neighbours.

But the person to whom the quaint house was dearest was Miss Rachel's great-niece, Iris Netherleigh. She loved her aunt very tenderly, and knew by heart the history connected with every one of her treasures, from the beau-

tiful old Chelsea figures and Plymouth dishes to the Indian curiosities sent home by Arthur Netherleigh on his first visit to India. Iris was a quiet, thoughtful child, older than her age, and in her way quite a companion to Miss Rachel, who delighted in a visit from her.

Her half-sister, Eve, was very different from Iris—a giddy, merry little fairy, who shirked her lessons, got into every description of mischief, and was as disobedient as she dared to be. But Eve was not a permanent inmate of the Gate House. When she was about ten years old, Mr. and Mrs. William Pleydell lost their little girl, who was to a day the same age. It was Mrs. William Pleydell's only child—Mr. Pleydell had a son by a former marriage—and the loss so affected her health that her husband wrote an urgent appeal to his sister-in-law, imploring her to let Eve come to them, if only for a short time. It was very seldom indeed that Mrs. Pleydell acted contrary to Aunt Rachel's advice, but on this occasion she did so. She had always regretted that the necessity of obeying her husband's last wishes had

obliged her to do what had evidently been extremely distasteful to her brother-in-law, and she hailed with satisfaction the opportunity of doing anything to show her good will. Not an idea of Miss Netherleigh's suspicions had ever entered her mind; she always saw the best side of everyone's character, and liked both Mr. and Mrs. Pleydell. Besides, the loss of an only child appeared to her a misfortune of so appalling a nature that she was eager to do anything that might in however slight a manner alleviate it.

"And you really mean to let the child go?" asked Miss Netherleigh.

"Indeed, Aunt Rachel, I do not see how I could refuse."

"Well, I should. You ought to think of the child first, and she will be ruined there, spoilt and indulged, and allowed to be as disobedient as ever she pleases."

"Dear Aunt Rachel, I assure you poor little Maud was a very good child, and kept in excellent order."

"Then she was of a different disposition from

Eve. Now if it had been Iris, it would not be half so bad."

"But, Aunt Rachel, after all, it is only a visit. Surely no such very great harm will be done in so short a time. Besides, how could I refuse? In the face of such a terrible misfortune, surely one must sacrifice one's own feelings, and deny oneself a little."

"Well, well, my dear, it sounds plausible, but all the same I don't like it. I don't think it is wise."

Mrs. Pleydell was much discomposed by Aunt Rachel's utterances. She was so accustomed to consult her in all things and to defer to her judgment, that she felt ill at ease in thus acting diametrically against her advice. Still she could not bring herself to refuse, and took Eve, who was enchanted at the idea of paying a visit, to London two days after the request had been made.

She had supposed that the child would return in about a fortnight, but time passed, and still Mrs. Pleydell begged to keep her a little longer. She was ordered to the South of France for the

winter, and declared she could not go without Eve. Her husband could only take her out and must then return to his business; she could not spend the winter entirely alone. Mrs. Pleydell consented not unwillingly; Eve was subject to severe colds in the winter, and doubtless a warmer climate might prove beneficial. But when the travellers returned, Mrs. William Pleydell still declared it to be impossible to part with Eve, and, after considerable hesitation, the mother, rather against her better judgment and in spite of Aunt Rachel's vehement disapprobation, consented to allow the girl to be adopted by her uncle and aunt.

At the time when this story commences Eve had been for eight years in Hyde Park Gardens, and was a little more than eighteen, while Iris, who had remained quietly at the Gate House, was just twenty-two.

CHAPTER II.

In spite of all the fools that pride has made,
 'Tis not on man a useless burden laid ;
 Pride has ennobled some, and some disgrac'd,
 It hurts not in itself, but as 'tis plac'd ;
 When right, its views know none but virtue's bound,
 When wrong, it scarcely looks one inch around.

STILLINGFLEET.

IT was a very lovely morning late in May, and the garden of the Gate House was in extreme beauty. Masses of rhododendrons, red, lilac, and white, were in full flower, while among them yellow and rich scarlet and orange azaleas, with here and there a delicate, porcelain-like kalmia, bloomed in profusion. The terrace walls were richly garlanded with wistaria, through the graceful lilac trails of which

peered a profusion of early roses. The delicate green of the as yet not fully foliaged beeches in the Beechmont woods, the vivid verdure of the water meadows on the opposite side of the river, with the red and white cattle standing knee deep in the lush grass, the grey spire of Bannerton Cathedral to the left of the landscape, and the exquisite outlines of the blue Rockshire hills in the far distance, made up a picture of uncommon beauty. So Iris Netherleigh seemed to think, for she paused in her flower-gathering and leant on the balustrade of the lower terrace, absorbed in admiration of the view before her.

Iris, who had just celebrated her twenty-second birthday, was a very beautiful girl. She was tall, and had a magnificent figure, an hereditary gift, as her Aunt Rachel always informed her, in the Netherleigh family,—indeed the old lady had every trace of having possessed that distinction herself. A beautifully clear and delicate complexion, a slightly aquiline nose, an exquisitely sensitive mouth, and large, grey eyes, combined to make Iris Netherleigh's face

one not easily to be forgotten. Her hair was of a rich golden bronze, rippling back from the broad, low brow which was unhidden by the slightest fringe, and forming long, thick loops at the back. Iris had an artist's eye, and knew better than to hide the beauty of her smooth, white brow.

She was rather a grave and stately damsel : some of the young people in the neighbourhood called her dull and stupid, but no such complaint was ever made of Iris by anyone who knew her well and had the capacity for appreciating really intelligent conversation. For inane jokes and silly "chaff" she had little taste, and perhaps she sometimes showed her disinclination a little too plainly. So at least her mother thought, for Mrs. Pleydell was essentially a gentle, yielding woman, and would submit patiently to be bored for an hour rather than make a movement that might suggest to her tormentor that she was weary. Her love for Iris was intense : she seemed to have concentrated upon her all the devotion she had felt for her first husband. But her love, deep

as it was, did not render her blind, perhaps, indeed, it rather quickened her perception of the girl's faults, and she knew well that the defect in Iris's character was pride. She was gentle, sweet-tempered, sunny, and unselfish, but she was defiantly proud, and Mrs. Netherleigh sighed over the fault she had vainly striven to eradicate, and felt a sad presentiment that it would mar her child's life. Aunt Rachel did not agree with her: she regarded pride as part of her niece's proper inheritance as a Netherleigh, and rather laughed at her sister-in-law's concern.

"At any rate, Grace, it is a fault on the right side," she would say: "and I am sure in these days it has the advantage of rarity. I do not see much of it in any of the girls who come to my house. It really often seems to me that they are so anxious to attract the young men, that they would be ready and willing to pick up their gloves for them! I've no patience with the manners of the day! Give me Iris' pride in preference; it's always a safeguard for a woman."

Mrs. Netherleigh never argued, it was not in her line, and besides she knew and respected Miss Rachel's prejudices, but none the less did she deplore what she considered her daughter's one fault, and strive to overcome it. Iris struggled herself, but it was against the grain; pride was so integral a part of her character, that it might almost be said to be against her own judgment, and merely in deference to her mother's wishes, that she strove at all.

She was a very fair object to gaze on as she leant on the 'grey balustrade with the basket of gorgeous azalea blossoms lying beside her, and the soft south-west breeze stirring the thick rippling masses of her hair beneath her rustic hat. Her eyes were fixed on the scene before her, but it was evident that her thoughts were far away. She was somewhat inclined to indulge in day-dreams, and while building her castles in the air was quite oblivious of where she was.

She started at the sound of her mother's voice calling her to breakfast, and ran hastily up the steps, preceded by her beautiful little

Skye terrier Fuss, who danced before her, barking and twirling with delight.

"You have been dreaming again, Iris," said her mother, as she kissed her: "surely those flowers were meant for the breakfast-table?"

"They were," confessed Iris, sitting down and beginning to pour out the coffee, "but, oh! mother, it is such a heavenly morning, I am sure even you might dream to-day."

"Instead of which I must go into Bannerton for the practical purpose of some household shopping. I have ordered the pony carriage at eleven, you shall drive me in."

Iris had arranged in her own mind that she would spend the day in the Beechmont woods, which were her favourite haunt in summer weather. She loved to sit on the gnarled roots of some giant beech, and look through the aisles of straight stems and overhanging boughs up to the Rockshire hills, dreaming the time away to the accompaniment of the rippling of the river and slumberous hum of the insects. But at the intimation that her mother wanted her, she silently gave up her project; she was

always ready cheerfully to sacrifice her own wishes to those of others.

"The post is very late," she remarked, presently: "it seems longer than usual since Eve wrote."

"I don't fancy we shall hear to-day," said her mother. "Mrs. William Pleydell's ball, you know, was to be the night before last, and Eve would be too tired to write yesterday,"

"I don't think balls tire her, she enjoys them too much."

"But at home of course there is more fatigue. Ah!" as the servant entered the room with the letters, "there is one from Eve, and one from Mrs. William too. This is more than I could have expected."

Mrs. Pleydell opened her daughter's letter. It was very short and she looked up in bewilderment.

"What can the child mean? Listen, Iris:

"DARLING MUMMY,—Isn't this smash dreadful and a horrid bore, just too at the beginning of such a good season. Tom brings me down

and we shall be at Bannerton at 5.17.—Your own EVE.’”

“Smash! what can it be?” said Iris.

“It must be something about the business, perhaps this will tell us;” and Mrs. Pleydell hastily opened her sister-in-law’s letter.

It was very incoherent, filled with exclamations of self-commiseration, of anger against her husband for “leaving her in such a desperate position,” of regret at being forced to part with Eve, and sorrow that the latter would not now have a chance of “following up her conquest,” ending with a bitter observation, “of course the issue shows how wise your husband was in insisting on your withdrawing the money, though it was that which was the beginning of the trouble.”

After reading the letter through several times it became at length tolerably clear that Mr. Pleydell had failed, and that he had disappeared while his wife’s ball was in progress.

“How very shocking!” exclaimed Mrs. Pleydell, “and you see, Iris, she says that the

withdrawal of my money was the beginning of their misfortunes! I must go up to London to see what can be done! I would go to-day, if Eve were not coming, but I can go to-morrow."

"Is it not very strange that Mr. Pleydell should have gone away like that?" said Iris.

"I confess I don't understand it, dear, but then I am not clever about such things. I daresay he had very good reasons, or he would never have left his wife alone, poor thing! Perhaps Tom Pleydell will be able to enlighten us when he comes."

So occupied had mother and daughter been with their letters that they had never thought of the papers, and drove into Bannerton without even glancing at the *Times*. Even the sight of "Failure in the City, Flight of the Bankrupt," which stared them in the face in huge letters in the news-sheets at the principal stationer's door, failed to connect itself in their minds with what they had that morning heard. It was not till, their shopping over, they reached Miss Rachel Netherleigh's drawing-room, that they were enlightened.

“Grace, I am surprised to see you! I thought you would of course be half-way to London to fetch Eve.”

“Eve comes down this afternoon with Tom Pleydell. But, Aunt Rachel, how do you know anything about it?”

“Know anything! My dear Grace, the *Times* is full of it—two or three accounts and a leading article. I always thought it was a suspicion that something he did not think quite honest was going on that made your husband so determined to withdraw his money, and it seems I was right.”

“Aunt Rachel, you never told me!”

“Because I had no certainty, Grace, and without it I had no right to make you suspicious of your husband’s relatives. Sit down now and tell me what you have heard, and read the paper.”

Mrs. William Pleydell’s letter elicited no comment from Miss Netherleigh but an emphatic “Umph!” Over Eve’s she muttered half to herself, “Heartless little puss!”

Meanwhile Mrs. Pleydell was studying the

Times, but it required some explanation from Aunt Rachel before she quite comprehended what had occurred. The account began with a short sketch of the rise of the house of Pleydell Brothers, than which it was said none at one time was more highly respected. Then the elder brother withdrew from the business, and became a mere sleeping partner, and from that time Mr. William Pleydell, left uncontrolled, had, in his haste to grow rich, not only embarked in hazardous speculations, but had also taken to courses not usually adopted by honourable business men. It was the discovery of this that had made the elder brother withdraw his money from the concern, and the shock was so terrible to him as to cause his death. The youngest brother dying not long after, Mr. William Pleydell was left as the sole representative of the firm, and continued his dangerous game uncontrolled. The result was a failure of a most disastrous kind, the more so as some very valuable securities were missing, and it was found that a large sum had been settled on his wife at the time of their marriage, as

well as the house in Hyde Park Gardens, and was therefore unavailable for the creditors, who it was greatly feared would get little more than five shillings in the pound. Moreover, the magnificent diamonds for which Mrs. William Pleydell was famous, and which she was wearing at her ball on the night of her husband's flight, were, on being seized the next morning, found to be only accurate copies in paste of the real jewels, which it was strongly suspected Mr. Pleydell had taken with him. His flight had been most artistically managed, for he had absolutely been present early in the evening at the ball in Hyde Park Gardens, and hitherto it had not been ascertained in which direction he had gone. The police, however, were believed to have a clue.

"How very shocking!" said Mrs. Pleydell, looking up when she had come to the end. "Poor Mrs. William, I shall go up to-morrow and see what I can do for her."

"My dear Grace, stay at home and do nothing of the kind. For heaven's sake don't go and mix yourself up with the matter."

“But, Aunt Rachel, she will want help—money, I mean. I cannot do very much, but it will be of some use; and don’t you see in her letter she says it was the withdrawal of my money that was the beginning of their misfortunes. I must help.”

“Now, Grace, be reasonable. You have just read that it was *in consequence of what he found to be going on* which he considered wrong that your husband, who was one of the most strictly honourable men I ever met, charged you to withdraw the money. The mischief and the wild speculation had begun then, and Mr William Pleydell would have been equally ruined if he had had the opportunity of losing your money as well as his own. Then as to his wife requiring help: do you not see that a large sum of money and the London house are settled upon her? She will be very well off.”

“Aunt Rachel, you don’t mean to say you think for one moment she will keep it! She could not. Of course she will give it all up to the creditors.”

"I doubt it, Grace. *If* she does, I will not say a word against your helping her; but you will hear soon enough. Don't rush up to London into business that would be very disagreeable to you, and that you wouldn't in the least understand."

"It seems so cold and unfeeling to stay quietly here and only write," said Mrs. Pleydell.

"It is wiser; and really, Grace, you should think of your daughters. Does it not strike you what a very disgraceful business it is? And that as Mrs. William Pleydell is certainly not in want, and is evidently well able to take care of herself, you had much better have as little to do with her as possible for the future?"

"I was going to ask her to come to us for a little."

"Then don't do anything of the sort."

"But she has been so good to Eve."

"She wanted Eve for her own pleasure."

"Isn't it rather hard to say that, Aunt Rachel?"

"It sounds hard to you, my dear Grace, because you are so amiable yourself that the idea

of self-seeking never occurs to you, and you cannot realize that it does to other people. What was the plea used to persuade you to let Eve stay with her aunt? Nothing for the good of the child, but merely that Mrs. William 'couldn't live without her,' or 'would droop and die if Eve was taken away,' or nonsense of that kind."

"You see she felt her only child's death so terribly, and Eve was just the same age."

"Other people lose only children, and have to bear it as best they may. I see, Grace, you think me very hard, but indeed I am not. I only want you to see matters clearly and not sentimentally, and to realize that it is Mrs. William Pleydell who is under a debt of obligation as regards Eve, not you. You have waived your claim to your own child for eight years to soothe her morbid feelings; she has naturally enough been kind, and I should fear far too indulgent to the toy you generously provided for her. It is not difficult to see the balance of the scale of obligation."

"Not as you put it, Aunt Rachel."

"As I put it! Now, Grace, is it not the simple fact?"

"Yes, yes, it is," said Mrs. Pleydell, hurriedly; "but still she has loved my child and been kind to her, I cannot strike what you call a strict balance between us. There is only one good thing in this sorrow, I shall have my Eve back."

"I am afraid she will be very sorry to come."

"Dear child, it is natural at her age that she should regret all the gaiety and pleasure. We must try and not let her find the Gate House very dull just at first."

"It is no worse for her than for Iris."

"Ah! but then Iris has lived there so long," and the mother turned to look lovingly at her beautiful daughter. "You know I have often wanted to take Iris to London, but she has always begged to put it off."

"We are so happy as we are," said Iris.

"Well, at any rate, you need not think of it this year," said Miss Netherleigh. "With this disgraceful business, a nine days' wonder, it would hardly be pleasant for you. Now, Grace,

you have quite abandoned your project of rushing up to London to-morrow?"

"Yes, as you think it best, Aunt Rachel."

But Mrs. Pleydell reserved to herself the power of writing, and a most warmly sympathetic letter was indited as soon as she returned home. She said nothing of her certainty that her sister-in-law would at once renounce the provision made for her; this seemed to her a simple matter of course, and she wondered how Miss Netherleigh could for a moment have doubted that it would be done. She offered help in the most generous manner, stating how much she could do, and offering it in a way that left no possible doubt of her sincerity.

While she was writing Iris had been busy upstairs seeing that everything was in readiness for Eve's arrival. She tried to feel glad that her little sister was coming home, to tell herself how pleased their mother would be to have her back again. But Iris, who was essentially candid-minded, could not persuade herself that it was to herself a source of rejoicing. She and her mother had been so happy and com-

fortable together, knew each other so well, and suited so perfectly, that it was difficult to her to believe that any change would not be for the worse. But the thought had hardly arisen before she reproached herself for it. How shocking that she should, even for a moment, regret the return home of her own sister, which would naturally give her mother so much pleasure! And, followed by Fuss, Iris ran down to the garden to gather flowers for the embellishment of Eve's room.

The two girls had seen very little of each other. Mrs. William Pleydell had always some excellent reason for not being able to spare Eve whenever her sister-in-law wanted her, really fearing that if she went to stay at the Gate House, her mother would never again be able to reconcile herself to a separation. Mrs. Pleydell's visits to London had been few and far between, and until Iris grew up she had generally paid them alone. When the girl came out she had intended taking a house in London, and introducing her into society, but this Iris had hitherto successfully resisted. Her

chief reason was that she knew her mother would cordially dislike it.

With her husband to support her, Mrs. Pleydell had enjoyed London society very much, and had entered into it freely, but she was rather a nervous, timid woman, and dreaded taking any step for herself; and the years that she had spent at the Gate House, only mixing in the county society, which was of course limited, had rendered her shyer and less inclined for social exertion than had formerly been the case. But, besides her dislike to the idea of her mother being distressed by doing anything irksome to her for her sake, Iris had a private reason for objecting to undergo the ordeal of a London season. She loved society, was exceedingly fond of dancing, was generally popular in any society she entered, but she had read foolish allusions to the London season as "the great marriage market," and sneers at the "husband-hunting mothers and daughters of Belgravia," and her pride made her feel that she would rather do anything than expose herself to be classed in the same category.

She hardly knew enough of the world to understand what nonsense the clap-trap articles she had read really were, or to realize that the deprecated pursuits were as energetically carried on in the country as in town, if not, indeed, more so; but her imagination had been struck and her pride roused, and she steadfastly resisted all proposals of a London season, thereby incurring her Aunt Rachel's considerable displeasure.

Perhaps, although Iris herself was really unaware of it, and would have been vehemently and honestly indignant if the idea had been suggested to her, the fact that young Mr. Furnivall of Rookwood particularly disliked London, and was always in the country during the summer, had more to do with her contentment at the Gate House than it would at all have suited her pride to allow. To the best of her belief, Iris's heart was as yet in her own keeping, but she could hardly be unaware that Laurence Furnival paid her infinitely more attention than he did any other young lady in the neighbourhood, and she allowed to herself

that he was very pleasant, and that she liked him better than anyone she had ever seen.

Now, as she moved about the garden gathering sprays of azalea and kalmia for Eve's room, the thought of what Aunt Rachel had said respecting the disgrace attendant on Mr. William Pleydell's bankruptcy and flight began to occur to Iris. Was it possible, as her aunt had half hinted, that some of the odium might fall on her darling mother, owing to her having, unfortunately, the same name? It seemed too hard, too unjust; and yet Iris had an immense respect for Aunt Rachel's worldly wisdom, and knew that she was not a person to speak unadvisedly. Could it be that they should be looked down upon for their connection with the culprit? and Iris held up her head defiantly, and her colour rose as she thought what a hard thing it was for a Netherleigh to bear! But even if there were so unjust a feeling at first, it surely must soon die away. Why, even the *Times* had borne testimony to the fact that her mother's husband had been most honourable and straightforward, and that it was entirely

owing to his disapproval of his brother's proceedings that he had withdrawn his money from the firm. Oh! yes, of course everyone must understand it. Still she wished her mother's name were not Pleydell; and, her flowers being gathered, Iris went indoors.

"I almost wish now I had gone to meet her," said Mrs. Pleydell, as she came in.

Mrs. Pleydell was rather inclined to wish she had done things when the time was past.

"You did quite enough this morning, mamma, and nothing can happen to Eve between the station and this."

"Happen! No. But it might have seemed kinder. They must soon be here now. Poor Tom Pleydell! This will be a sad blow for him."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Iris, who at that moment did not feel very cordially towards the Pleydell family. "Do you think he will stay long?"

"Oh, no! I should think he would go by the first train to-morrow. There must be a great deal of business to do. I wish Aunt

Rachel hadn't made such a point of my not asking Mrs. William here. Somehow, when I wrote, it seemed so cold and heartless not to finish by asking her to come and stay as long as was convenient to her, but I did not like to go against Aunt Rachel. Ah! Iris, there are wheels. Yes—it is stopping—it is Eve."

CHAPTER III.

Unknit that threat'ning, unkind brow ;
It blots thy beauty, as frosts bite the meads.

Taming of the Shrew.—Act v., Sc. 2.

BEFORE Mrs. Pleydell or Iris could reach the door, Eve came flying into the room in a sort of whirlwind of kisses and exclamations.

“Dear mummy, how nice to see you ! But isn't it horrid to have to leave London ? There was to be such a lovely ball to-night ! It makes me cry to think of it.”

“We will try to amuse you here, my pet.”

“Ah ! but it won't be the same thing ;

nothing ever can. But Aunt Louisa says I must try to bear it for a little while."

Then suddenly observing Fuss, who was sniffing suspiciously round her, she exclaimed,

"Oh, you must send away that dog! He will frighten Mousse."

"Nonsense, my dear," said her mother, laughing. "Fuss is a respected member of the family, and not to be dismissed summarily. Who is Mousse? And where is he?"

"I left him in the fly with Tom and Toinette. He is my Maltese, and he can't bear other dogs."

"He must learn to bear with Fuss."

"But he is such an ugly creature! Can't he go to the stable, or Mousse will be miserable. Where can Tom be that he does not bring him in, or Toinette? She knows I am never happy without him."

A diversion was made by the entrance of Mr. Tom Pleydell with a little ball of white wool in his arms representing Mousse, who was at once seized upon by his mistress, rapturously hugged and embraced, and assured that the nasty dog

shouldn't hurt him and should be sent away. Whenever Fuss became visible Mousse snarled violently, and when Iris attempted to pat him and make friends, snapped at her most determinedly.

Meanwhile Mrs. Pleydell was greeting her nephew, for whom she felt the sincerest compassion. It was not only that the whole course of his life was changed, that from being the only son of a wealthy and prosperous merchant he was now almost penniless and would have to begin life as he had never expected to have to do in a subordinate position, but that he must feel acutely the charges of dishonesty so freely made against his father. It was plain indeed that he was suffering: he looked hopelessly depressed, very unlike the cheerful, perhaps somewhat oppressively merry Tom Pleydell, whom his aunt had been accustomed to see in her visits to Hyde Park Gardens. She would say nothing about business now, though she felt she must have a long talk with him before he left, which he said he must do early the ensuing morning: she would have her talk with

him alone, not before the girls; there might be many things he would prefer saying to her only.

Tom Pleydell was not a handsome man. He was about six and twenty, not tall, but sturdy and thick set, with black hair and a somewhat swarthy skin. His eyes were black and piercing, and his countenance was unprepossessing until he smiled, when people almost wondered that they had at first thought him plain, but returned to their former opinion when the smile departed. He took his part in the general talk going on with evident effort, and had an air of settled melancholy that went to his aunt's heart.

For the moment, however, her thoughts were rather occupied by Toinette, who turned out to be Eve's maid, and was a somewhat embarrassing importation. It had never occurred to Mrs. Pleydell that her daughter would bring a maid of her own, concluding that she had been attended to by her aunt's maid, and no preparation had consequently been made. It appeared too on inquiry that Mademoiselle Toinette was

not easily satisfied ; being inconsolable at leaving London she found fault with everything, and absolutely refused to occupy the same room as Rogers, Mrs. Pleydell's maid. Happily Mrs. Pleydell was very decided in domestic matters. She at once told the woman that her services would be no longer required, that she would pay her the next morning, and that if she did not choose to occupy the room offered her she could sit up all night, as no other would be got ready.

The result was that, a few minutes after they went up to dress for dinner, Eve came flying into her mother's room.

"Mummy, mummy, say it isn't true ! It must be a mistake !"

"What, my pet ?"

"That you have given Toinette warning. I can't do without her ! She shan't go !"

"Hush, Eve, you forget what you are saying."

"No, I don't. She is *my* maid. No one has any right to send her away but me !"

"Eve, my dear, go to your room. When you

think for a moment, you will be sorry for having spoken so improperly."

"But Toinette is the only person who ever could dress me properly, or who understands my fringe. I *can't* and won't do without her."

"You will have to, my dear," said her mother, quietly; and Eve flung herself out of the room in a tempest of passionate tears.

Mrs. Pleydell, as she prepared for dinner, felt positive dismay at the revelation. How terribly Eve must have been spoilt for it to be possible for her to speak and act as she just had done! After all, perhaps Aunt Rachel had been right all along, and she had done wrong in giving up her child to the care of another. She had done it with the best of motives, but perhaps she had been mistaken and had done wrong. Well, it was too late to think of that now. All she could do was to strive to the utmost to undo the mischief that had been done, and in doing so she must take every care to remember that the fault lay with herself, not with Eve: she must be firm with the girl, but not harsh.

It was rather a surprise to see Eve come into the drawing-room before dinner, looking as radiant as if nothing had occurred to disturb her. Mrs. Pleydell felt relieved ; perhaps, after all, the ebullition had been mere childish petulance ; at any rate, it was a comfort to find that the girl had not that most trying of all things, a sulky temper. Very pretty Eve looked in her dress of pale blue gauze trimmed with cream lace, far too elaborate for a home dinner-party, but eminently becoming to her. She was a tiny little creature, with a figure of fairy-like proportions. Her skin was dazzlingly fair, with a faint rose-blush on the cheeks ; her hair, of a pale gold, was arranged in an elaborate mass of curls falling over her forehead ; her eyes were brown and velvety, with dark lashes and delicately pencilled eyebrows. She was a dazzling little figure, but both Mrs. Pleydell and Iris observed with dismayed disapproval how very low her dress was cut, and that she had practically no sleeves, her soft round white arms being merely veiled with the thinnest gossamer.

Eve took possession of the conversation, and chattered without intermission during the whole of dinner, only occasionally waiting for an answer from her cousin Tom, when her statements required verification. Her talk was exclusively of herself—of her own pleasures in London, and of her unspeakable sorrow at leaving it. Iris essayed more than once to talk a little to Tom Pleydell, but Eve always ruthlessly broke into their conversation, and claimed his attention for herself.

As soon as they left the dining-room, she twined her fingers round her sister's arm, and implored her to come out for a few moments on the terrace, where the full moon was making everything look so lovely, and, after a brief pause to obtain the shawls on which their mother insisted, they stepped out into the garden, and were lost to sight among the groups of azaleas, which were loading the air with their fragrance.

Mrs. Pleydell was not sorry to be left alone for a little; she wanted to think, to consider what manner of child it was that had been re-

turned to her. Her mind misgave her terribly. Eve's frivolous and egotistical chatter might be only the effervescence of extreme youth, but she felt a sad prevision that it was the outcome of a thoroughly selfish nature. If such proved to be the case, how should she ever forgive herself for having allowed her child to spend the eight years most important in the formation of character away from her? She began, now that it was too late, to doubt whether Mrs. William Pleydell was a woman well qualified to bring up a young girl in the wisest manner. It seemed to her as if she had never thought of this before, that her great and exceeding pity for the mother bereaved of her only child had caused her to think only of what might soothe her grief, and not of the moral welfare of her own little one. Everything seemed to present itself in a new light to her to-night, probably because she had been so startled by Eve's passionate utterances respecting Toinette, and also owing to her astonishment that her sister-in-law could ever have allowed the girl to wear such a dress. Mrs. Pleydell felt quite hurt at the

thought that even Tom, a cousin, should have seen her in it.

She had not been alone very long before Tom Pleydell entered, and seated himself opposite to her. After a few casual observations, she said,

“My dear Tom, I want to talk to you a little about—about this sad business. It must have been a terrible shock to you all.”

“Yes; I had felt for some time that something was wrong, Aunt Grace. Still I had no idea how bad it was.”

“Neither, I suppose, had your father?”

Tom paused and flushed scarlet.

“Aunt Grace, you are the only person to whom I would say it, but—I am afraid my father had known it for a long time, and had been preparing for it. You see, there is a good deal of money missing. He converted the securities into money gradually, and, as far as appears, has taken it with him.”

“How very shocking!—how I do feel for you and for his wife! Tom, tell me truly, was it the withdrawal of my money? I could not

help it, you know—my husband laid his dying commands upon me—*was* it that which gave the first shake to the firm?”

“No, certainly not. What should make you think so?”

“Mrs. William hinted it in her letter.”

“She had no right to do so. She never knew anything of the business, and, if she had, she would have known such was not the case. But she was nearly frantic at first—you must not mind anything she said.”

“My dear Tom, I do not. But I own it is a relief to me to know that I was not the unwilling and innocent means of commencing the ruin. Do you know where your father is?”

“No, I have not an idea, I am thankful to say.”

“Thankful?”

“Yes. Don’t you know,” flushing hotly, “that it is a case of ‘gross fraud,’ and that in these days of extradition treaties he would not be safe if it were known where he had gone?”

“I had not thought of that. Does not his wife know?”

“No. He left a note on her dressing-table telling her not to be uneasy about him, but that he could not communicate with her till the first excitement had a little blown over; and that he had her diamonds quite safe.”

“Her diamonds! Why, the paper said they had been found to be paste!”

“Yes. It is a bad business altogether, Aunt Grace. I could talk of it to no one but you; I was so fond, so proud of my father, and to think that he of all men should have fallen like this. He had the diamonds all copied a year ago, and the originals taken out of their settings.”

“Tom!”

“It is so, indeed.”

“I can’t say how sorry I am for you and her.”

“She feels it very much; but in a different way from what—you would.”

“Do you think she would like to come and stay here? I wrote to her to-day offering to do what I could in the way of money—it is not so very much, but it would, at any rate, be

something—and she could stay here as long as she chose.”

“It is very good of you, Aunt Grace ; but—I don’t know, of course—I can’t say—but I doubt if it would suit her. But as to money, I don’t think you quite know how matters stand. She is very well off indeed—considerably better than you are.”

“Tom ! You don’t mean to say you think for one moment that she would keep the money settled upon her while there was a single creditor unpaid ? It is not as if she had children to consider, that would make all the difference.”

“She means to do so. She absolutely refuses to give up a shilling of it.”

Through Mrs. Pleydell’s mind there darted the thought, “Aunt Rachel said it would be so. Aunt Rachel is always right. She blamed me for letting Eve go away from me. Heaven grant that in disregarding her advice I may not have ruined my child’s disposition !”

“Surely she will change ! That was only a hasty determination,” she said, presently.

“I fear not. She put it in writing, and sent

it to the meeting of the creditors. Of course, you know, she is only acting on her legal rights."

"Perhaps. I could not have believed it. It seems to me distinctly dishonest!"

Tom did not answer. He sat with his head leaning on his hand, looking the picture of dejection.

"And for yourself, Tom," said his aunt, at length: "what are you thinking of doing? Happily, you are independent, for there is your mother's fortune, which is, of course, yours, though it is but a small one."

"I gave it up to the creditors," said Tom, quietly.

"My dear boy! I honour you for it, but surely it was rather Quixotic. There could be no question of the honesty, of the legitimacy of that settlement. It was made in your grandfather's time, before your father had any power in the firm, before there was even a thought of difficulty or failure. You need not have done it, Tom!"

"I was not obliged to, I know, Aunt Grace;

but—it was all I could do, and—I could not do otherwise.”

“And what do you mean to do?”

“I shall try for a clerk’s place. It is all I am fit for, and I know I can do the work thoroughly well.”

“Tom, you must promise me one thing.”

“What, Aunt Grace?”

“That until you are independent you will let me make you an allowance, just what the interest of your fortune was.”

Tom came across to her and wrung her hand; then, going back to his chair, he said, in a husky and somewhat unsteady voice,

“Aunt Grace, I don’t know what to say. You are more than kind to make such an offer, and I love you for it. Still I’d rather not take it, only I know that you really do mean it, and that you’ll feel hurt and sorry if I don’t.”

“That I certainly shall.”

“But before I can say anything more about it, there is something of much more consequence I

have to say to you, Aunt Grace," and here he rose, and, walking to the window, looked out into the moonlight, keeping his face turned from her. "Don't think me very presumptuous, I oughtn't to say anything about it now, but I can't feel honest if I don't tell you. I—I love Eve."

"Eve!" exclaimed Mrs. Pleydell, in astonishment. "Why, my dear Tom, she is a mere child!"

"She is past eighteen," he said, quietly, "and she was out all last season; that is to say, she went out at night, for as far as anything else goes she never has been 'in.' She is anything but a child."

"She is so young, and she looks a mere baby," said her mother, musingly.

"Of course, I know I have no right even to think of her now, after what has happened," said poor Tom, ruefully.

Mrs. Pleydell turned to him quickly.

"Tom, don't for a moment imagine that I was thinking of that. Eve will have enough of her own without my troubling myself about

her husband's fortune. But—there are other things.”

“Yes, I know—the disgrace,” said Tom, quietly.

“The disgrace does not attach to you beyond the mere fact of the name, and that is ours already,” replied his aunt. “No. I was thinking that she is far too young to marry or even to know her own mind; and then,” she paused, and then added quickly, “you are cousins.”

“She has seemed to know her own mind pretty well once or twice already,” said Tom, gravely.

“Tom! you don't mean to say anyone has ever proposed to the child already, and that I have never heard of it?”

“Two people have to my knowledge—one of them my step-mother approved of very much, and was very vexed with Eve for refusing, but she thought him old and dull, and would have nothing to say to him. Of course, I never knew whether you were told or not.”

“I never heard a syllable. Somehow I never

seem to have realized till to-night that she is grown up."

There was a long pause, and then Mrs. Pleydell said,

"And what are Eve's feelings in the matter?"

"I wish I knew. Sometimes I fancy she cares for me, then again she seems different. But yet till this trouble came I was full of hope."

"If she cares for you, that could make no difference. Then you have not spoken to her?"

"No, I have always been afraid. As long as I had not spoken, as she had not rejected me, I could hope. In fact I feared my fate too much."

"But you believe she cares for you?"

"Sometimes I do. She is very variable in her moods, but still I hope."

"I still doubt her being old enough to know her own mind. I should not say so, for I was married as young myself, but her looks and ways are so childish."

"She has been living in the world, except the

mere fact of going to balls, ever since she was twelve years old."

"And then there is the relationship. That, Tom is, I confess, to me a terrible drawback."

"But you will not withhold your consent on that account only, Aunt Grace?"

"Not if Eve is really in love with you."

"May I ask her?"

"No, not at present. I must judge for myself on that point. I don't know, but I fear the child is of a frivolous disposition, and I must be very sure that she is quite in earnest before I waive what is really a very serious objection."

"And when——"

"When may you speak? I will let you know. I must have time to observe and to know the child thoroughly, but I promise you shall know honestly what I think."

"I may not speak to her myself?"

"Not yet at all events. Don't look so down-cast, my dear Tom. Surely you can trust to my telling you honestly whether I think there is any chance for you?"

"I am sure anything you told me would be

what you honestly thought ; but—I don't think it is quite the same thing."

"You don't imagine surely that I am going to propose to her in your stead? No," with a soft laugh, "I quite agree with you that would *not* be the same thing. I only want to have her quietly to myself for a little. I shall soon know whether she is fancy free."

"You would rather find her so," he said, with a lamentable attempt at a smile.

"Frankly, yes—because of the cousinship, and also because she seems to me so childish and unformed. But rely upon it, I will tell you what I think unreservedly, whether it is in accordance with my views or yours."

"Thank you, Aunt Grace, I can trust you."

"Tom," cried Eve at the window, "how can you sit stifling in there, this lovely night. Come out and look at the moon."

He rose, and as he passed Mrs. Pleydell he said, in a low voice, "You may trust me. I shall say nothing to her."

He joined the girls on the terrace, and very soon after Iris came in.

“Are you tired, dear?” asked her mother.

“Oh, no! but Eve asked me in the most innocent way if I had ever heard a saying about two being company and three the reverse.”

“She does not care a bit about him,” was Mrs. Pleydell’s immediate reflection; “if she did, she would be shy and reticent.” Then she said, “And what have you been talking about all this time?”

“I have hardly opened my lips,” answered Iris, laughing; “Eve has been more than eloquent, imploring me to intercede with you and prevent the departure of Toinette. She declares that she shall be perfectly miserable, absolutely hideous, and obliged to stay in bed if you do not relent.”

“Ridiculous child! I hope you gave her no hopes?”

“Certainly not, but I think she talked too fast to hear, or at any rate to realise, what I said. In fact, I believe she has talked herself into the persuasion that I have promised that Toinette shall be reinstated.”

“I wish it were not necessary to thwart the

child the moment she comes home, but it is impossible to think of keeping the woman; she was intolerably insolent."

"I'm sure if she made that gown——"

"My dear, don't talk of it. I have been feeling all the evening that Aunt Rachel was right, as she always is, and that I have been very wrong to part with Eve."

"Now, mother," said Iris, bending down and kissing her, "I will not have you distressing and blaming yourself. You know quite well what you did was done with the kindest and best of intentions at a great sacrifice of your own wishes and feelings. Even if it does not turn out to have been for the best after all, you have nothing to blame yourself with."

"I am afraid, from what you say, Eve will be very vexed."

"Well, yes, I think she will."

"Well, it can't be helped. Ah! Eve," as the girl and her cousin passed the window, "you have been out long enough. Come in and sit quiet a little."

Eve came in and curled herself up in the

corner of the sofa, but in a very few minutes she got up again, wandered a little about the room, and, passing close to Iris, whispered in her ear,

“Have you said anything? Have you managed it?”

“Eve dear, don’t whisper, it is not polite,” said her mother.

“Oh! I was only asking Iris something.”

“Yes, Eve,” said Iris, “I told mother what you said.”

“Do you mean about Toinette?” said Mrs. Pleydell, quietly; “my dear Eve, you will soon find that when I once say a thing I mean it. I gave Toinette warning, as you heard, and she will go to-morrow.”

Eve threw herself on the sofa in a perfect storm of sobs and lamentations, crossly repelling Iris, who tried to soothe her.

“Get away, you haven’t done what you promised, you said you would make it all right, and you haven’t. How am I ever to look nice without Toinette? No one else understands my hair,”

Mrs. Pleydell signed to Iris to leave her sister to herself; and addressed some indifferent questions to Tom, to which he responded, seconding her efforts to keep up a conversation. Eve sobbed passionately for some minutes, then finding herself completely unnoticed, which evidently surprised her not a little, she rose sulkily and left the room, slamming the door behind her. Mrs. Pleydell dropped her work and looked at Tom.

“How can you try to persuade me she is anything but a child?”

“I know it looks like it, but she has been spoilt, I know. If she cried for a moment in Hyde Park Gardens, the whole house was upset. She is so sweet-tempered, and amiable, and sunny, it is only a thunder-shower sometimes.”

“Well, I hope your simile is correct, and that it clears the air,” said Mrs. Pleydell; but she went to bed feeling far from happy about her youngest daughter.

CHAPTER IV.

Ladies of fashion starve their happiness to feed their vanity, and their love to feed their pride.

COLTON.

Light minds are like bladders blown up with anything.

LEIGHTON.

THE next morning when Mrs. Pleydell, Iris, and Tom were seated at breakfast, Eve made her appearance in an elaborate blue cashmere dressing-gown trimmed with lace, and her hair streaming loose over her shoulders.

“Eve!” exclaimed her mother, in dismay, “go upstairs again this moment! How could you think for a moment of coming down without dressing?”

“I am as much dressed as I am likely to be,”

said Eve, seating herself coolly. "Toinette is gone, and I can't dress without her."

"I sent Rogers to you."

"An old frump came, but she hadn't an idea what to do with my hair, or how to put on my jersey, so I came down as I am."

"Go upstairs at once," said Mrs. Pleydell, "I will send up your breakfast. Don't hesitate, Eve, do as you are told."

"Tom," said Eve, turning to him, "if I'm to be imprisoned upstairs till I'm fit to be seen, I shan't see you again. Tell Aunt Louisa how miserable I am, and that I hope she'll send for me very soon."

"Surely the child does not fancy she is going back," said Mrs. Pleydell, when Eve had left the room.

"There was something said about it, I know."

"Of course it is not to be thought of. Indeed, Tom, I fear Eve has been terribly spoiled."

"You have only seen the worst of her. She is so bright, so loving, so affectionate."

“What perfectly lovely hair!” said Iris, “it is like gold-coloured floss silk.”

“Whatever shall we do about the maid?” said Mrs. Pleydell. “Rogers says she cannot undertake you both, and yet it is out of the question that the child should have a maid to herself.”

“We had better have a girl to work under Rogers and let her learn to do Eve’s hair,” said Iris; “Aunt Rachel said the other day that Ruth Baynet wanted such a place.”

Thus it was finally settled, and Eve, finding that her mother was quite in earnest, and would not allow her to appear unless properly dressed, thought sitting in her own room very dull, and speedily discovered a means of making herself presentable, though she looked very sulky, and made herself and Mousse as disagreeable as was possible to Fuss, who, however, was a sweet-tempered dog, and bore it beautifully. But the Toinette episode had one very good effect; it showed Eve that her mother meant what she said, and was not to be turned from it by either tears or sulks: it was a great point to have established.

Mrs. William Pleydell's answer to her sister-in-law's generous offer fully confirmed Tom's description of her intentions. She "thanked her dear Grace more than she could express, she was more than kind and generous," but she went on to explain that, "happily dear William's foresight had rendered her quite independent of any assistance, though of course she felt very bitterly in what a different style she must live from that to which she had so long been accustomed. She should sell the house in Hyde Park Gardens, and take a smaller one, though in a better situation, Belgravia in all probability, and hoped, when the first blush of the present disagreeableness had blown over, to make her new home as pleasant to Eve as the old one. She thought for the present she should go abroad, as of course it would be impossible to go out any more that season, while this unpleasant business was a nine days' wonder."

"Aunt Rachel is right again," said Mrs. Pleydell, as she gave Iris the letter to read. "Well, I need not answer it, but one thing

is very clear: Eve shall never go back."

That afternoon, finding herself alone with her youngest daughter, Mrs. Pleydell proceeded to interrogate her as to her life in London, and elicited that, as Tom had said, she had always been out, except as to the actual fact of being taken to dinners and balls. Even of these she had had some experience in juvenile dances. Then the year before she had come out regularly, and had gone out every night.

"Oh! it was too heavenly!" cried Eve, throwing herself back among the sofa-cushions, "and it was all beginning again this year, and then to be stopped in the middle and sent down to this wretched place! It is too, too hard!"

"You forget this is your home, Eve. You might be glad, I should think, to be with me again."

"Oh! yes, of course, mummy dear, I know," and Eve nestled up to her mother, and rubbed her cheek against hers in a most caressing manner; "but then, don't you see, I could have come and paid you a visit in August, before we

went to Trouville, and then I shouldn't have lost all my fun, and it would have done quite as well for you."

"Scarcely, Eve. I am very glad to have you at home for good."

"For good!" with a violent start; "but Aunt Louisa said she should have me back very soon."

"I shall not let you go, Eve."

"But you don't surely mean"—Eve sat up and spoke with the energy of despair—"you *can't* mean to bury me here!"

"It is no more being buried for you than it is for Iris."

"Oh! but Iris is quite old—she is past two and twenty—of course it does not matter for her."

"What a silly child you are!" said her mother, laughing. "In a day or two we must find you some employment, and pay some attention to the education which I fear must have been terribly neglected while you have been amusing yourself so much."

"Aunt Louisa said I knew quite enough,"

said Eve. "She said it was a great mistake for a girl to know too much, that men didn't like it."

"I don't see that their not liking it makes any difference."

"Why, mamma, what else can possibly signify?"

Eve looked so thoroughly surprised that it was evident that this view had been carefully inculcated upon her. Mrs. Pleydell did not speak for a minute, and the girl went on—

"Aunt Louisa said I knew everything that was requisite; I dance better than most people, and I can sing little French songs, and I know how to accompany all the songs out of the comic operas and burlesques, and I know French well, and can talk to the dressmakers, and write a clear hand for notes. What more can anyone want?"

"A steady course of reading with me and Iris will do you no harm, child."

"I read novels a good deal to Aunt Louisa. She liked exciting ones, like Ouida's, and so did I."

"I mean something very different from novels," said Mrs. Pleydell, hastily, dismayed at the direction her daughter's studies had taken; then, thinking she might as well take this opportunity of commencing her observations as to Tom Pleydell's chance with Eve, she observed, "Tom was sorry to go away without wishing you really good-bye this morning."

"Poor old Tom!" said Eve, carelessly. "Well, it doesn't much matter; he's sure to be down here again very soon."

"Why should you think so? He said nothing about it."

"Oh! but he couldn't keep away, I know."

"What do you mean?" said her mother, thinking that, in spite of himself, Tom must have said something to enlighten her as to his feelings.

"Oh! because"—with a laugh—"he's such awful spoons upon me!"

"Eve, I really must forbid your talking slang; it is most unladylike. If you mean that you think that your cousin cares for you——"

“Think, mummy! why, it’s plain enough. I could do just whatever I chose with him.”

“And do you care for him?”

Mrs. Pleydell thought that, as her daughter appeared inclined to be so very outspoken, she might as well make herself *au fait* of the situation at once.

“Well, in a way, of course. Oh, yes; I’m very fond of poor old Tom. If he had proposed to me a week ago, I verily believe I should have said yes, though of course I ought to do much better, as Aunt Louisa always said. Still he was very rich, and he’d never have prevented my doing what I liked. I’m sure I should have said yes. How lucky he didn’t! because of course it would be all off now.”

“Why?”

Poor Mrs. Pleydell, one of the most unworldly of women, one who regarded love as a sacred and undying sentiment, was fairly aghast at her daughter’s coolness.

“Why, mamma, how can you ask? Uncle William is ruined, and, as if that wasn’t bad enough, Tom has been so silly. He has given

up his mother's fortune—which no one had any claim upon—and says he is going to work as a clerk."

"Very noble and honourable of him, my dear. And do you mean you would have given him up for that?"

"Why, mamma," with an expression of extreme surprise, "what else *could* I have done? I shouldn't have had a carriage, or a pretty house, or been able to go out, or to entertain. Where would have been the sense of my marrying?"

"As long as you see things in such a light, Eve, I devoutly hope you may never marry!" exclaimed her mother.

"Mummy!"—in an accent of horror—"surely you wouldn't like me to be a horrid old maid, like—like—old Miss Netherleigh?"

"Eve, I wish I could hope to see you as good, as kind, and as happy as Aunt Rachel. A horrid old maid indeed! My dear, you are a silly little girl, and don't know in the very least what you are talking about. You will see Aunt Rachel to-morrow—it is her day—

and then you will see that no married woman could be more considered than she is in Bannerton and the neighbourhood."

"Her day! Is it a party?" cried Eve, eagerly; then the look of excitement dying out of her face. "After all, I suppose, there'll be nobody there to talk to—only the bishop and the dean, and a lot of frumpish clergymen's wives."

"You will see," said Mrs. Pleydell, who felt that her interview with her daughter had been almost too much for her, divulging as it had done so many unwelcome traits in the girl's character. She wanted to be alone to think, to consider what course it would be wisest to pursue.

Meanwhile Eve had risen, and was wandering listlessly about the room.

"Have you no books, mummy?" she said, at last. "I want something to read, and I can see nothing but stupid travels, and memoirs, and things. Where are the novels?"

"I don't think we had any in the last box. Neither Iris nor I care for them much. But

there are some standard ones on that shelf. You can choose one, if you like."

Eve selected "The Mill on the Floss," and began to read it, half lying on the sofa in a most *négligée* attitude. Her mother begged her to sit up properly, and with a very ill grace she did so, but she had not read for ten minutes before she put down her book, yawned, began to stroll about the room, fidgeting with all the ornaments on the tables, and disturbing the flower-vases by taking out any flower that pleased her fancy to make into a bouquet for the front of her dress. Then she seated herself at the piano, and began to sing snatches of French songs, but, as her mother observed, she never finished anyone of them. In a very short time this amusement too apparently palled. She rose from the piano and sauntered to the window.

"Where is Iris?" she asked, at length. "Where is she hiding herself?"

"She has gone to see three or four poor women."

“District-visiting!” exclaimed Eve, with a toss of her head. “I didn’t think she was quite old enough even yet to be obliged to take to that.”

“What has age got to do with it? I hope you will go and see the poor people, too. Iris has done so ever since she was twelve years old.”

“I, mummy! I go into frowsy, dirty cottages! Why, I should dirty my pretty dresses, and catch fevers and things.”

“Iris does not. And, my dear Eve, you mustn’t imagine that you are to go on fidgeting about the room doing nothing as you have done this morning. You would drive me wild. Have you no work?”

“Work? Oh, no, mummy, it is *such* a bore.”

“What did you do in the morning in Hyde Park Gardens?”

“Oh! I don’t know. We breakfasted about half-past ten, and then we went out shopping, or some one came in to talk, and we sat in the park; or perhaps two or three men used

to drop in, and we practised jolly songs; and luncheon always seemed to come the minute breakfast was over; and whenever we were alone, there were all the new novels; but there is never anything to do in the country"—with a desperate yawn. "Will Iris be out all day?"

"No; she will soon be in, but she will hardly help you to idle. She reads in her own room till luncheon."

"Novels?" asked Eve, with a ray of hope.

"No, certainly not. To-day is her day for German, and she is reading Goethe."

"How dull! She might as well be at school," said Eve; "and after all, as Aunt Louisa says, 'what possible good can it do a girl?' Oh, mummy, the happiest time of my life till I came out really, was when Prince's was in full swing; I used to skate there nearly all day."

"I wish you had been learning your lessons instead."

"That wouldn't have taught me to know people, or how to manage men."

Mrs. Pleydell was silent. She really hardly knew how to begin to make her child understand the very different standard by which she herself judged things, and by which she hoped to teach her to guide her conduct. She knew that Aunt Rachel's counsel would be invaluable, but at the same time felt certain that she would gravely disapprove of Eve and her ways.

When Iris appeared at luncheon, Eve was unspeakably astonished at the way in which she spoke of her morning's occupation.

"Really, Iris, to hear you," she said, when they went out into the garden afterwards, "one would think you *enjoyed* poking about dirty cottages."

"They are not dirty," said Iris; "and, as to enjoying it, who would not like to bring a little brightness, comfort, and sunshine into hard lives?"

"You talk just like a good little book," said Eve, laughing. "Tell me, is the curate very charming?"

"The curate?" said Iris, with a look of sur-

prise. "We have no curate here, and I am sure we do not want one. Mrs. Lewis does twice as much in the way of parish work as any curate could do, and Mr. Lewis is very active."

"A married clergyman, and yet you go to the cottages! What would Aunt Louisa say? She always says girls only go to see poor people that they may flirt with the curates."

"I suppose even your aunt may be mistaken sometimes," said Iris, rather coldly.

Her pride rebelled at the mere suggestion of going anywhere for the sake of meeting any man.

"What are we to do this afternoon?" asked Eve presently.

"I don't know anything, unless you would like a walk."

"Ah! we might go into Bannerton."

"It is too far for a walk. If you like, we can have the pony-carriage, and go to the afternoon service."

"I don't care much about church on a week-

day. Do many people go? Shall we see anyone to talk to afterwards?"

"That is a mere chance—we may or may not."

"Well"—with a portentous yawn,—“let us go. It must be better than this, at any rate. Even the sight of a street will be a relief from stupid trees and flowers.”

“I will order the pony-carriage; be ready in half an hour.”

Eve occupied the time in donning a most becoming toilette, and, though she moaned all the way over the dismissal of Toinette and the consequent impossibility of her hair being “decently done,” she certainly looked excessively pretty. She attracted a good deal of attention in the streets of Bannerton, of which she was fully aware, and even in the cathedral she was quite conscious that many eyes were turned upon her. There happened to be an unusually large congregation, and after the service many people came up to speak to Iris. Eve felt quite elated at the number of acquaintances to whom her sister introduced her, and

observed to her surprise that they were not, as she had conceived must be the case in a cathedral city, exclusively old and dowdy. The choir at Bannerton was famous, and the anthem formed the object for a drive for many of the country neighbours, as well as an attraction to the officers quartered at the barracks. Several of the latter were introduced to Eve, and the sight of them considerably modified her views as to the prospective dulness of her life at the Gate House.

"I don't think Bannerton seems as if it would be quite such a dead-alive place as I expected," she said, when they were once more seated in the pony-carriage. "Does anyone ever give anything amusing—dances or anything of that sort?"

"There are a good many balls in the winter," said Iris. "The public ones in the town depend on the parties that people bring, because the townspeople come, and they are—well, not very nice; we don't know any of them, of course. Even the dances at the barracks are rather spoilt by them; but they are very civil

to the officers, and of course they are obliged to ask them."

"But will there be nothing before winter? It is a long way off," said Eve, dolefully.

"There are Aunt Rachel's Thursdays—they are always pleasant; we are going to one to-morrow. Then there is a small dance at the barracks on Monday—*very* small, Captain Allardyce said, and they have the athletic sports on Wednesday; and Mr. Sargent said to-day they were going to get up a picnic in the Beechmont woods. Mrs. Furnivall told me to-day she was going to have a garden-party the week after next, and that perhaps there would be dancing afterwards; so, you see, Eve, you have plenty of dissipation in prospect."

"Plenty, do you call it?" said Eve, with a groan; "just enough to prevent one from going to sleep comfortably and forgetting one's miseries."

"Eve," said Iris, earnestly, "do not say things like that before mamma. Of course I know you do not mean them, but it would hurt

her to hear you speak as if you were sorry to come home."

"But I am. Iris, when were the Beechmonts here last?"

"Four years ago."

"Do you know them?"

"Oh, yes. I saw a good deal of Lady Imogene; she draws most beautifully."

"She is very plain; the one who came out last year is awfully pretty."

"Lady Hildegarde?"

"Yes. Have you heard anything of their coming this year? She and I were rather pals."

"Pals! Eve, don't talk such slang! Neither mamma nor Aunt Rachel can bear it."

"Old Miss Netherleigh has nothing to do with me."

"She is so kind you can't help being fond of her."

"She is your aunt, not mine, I am glad to say. She always made mummy cross to me when I was a child. But you haven't told me about the Beechmonts."

"I have heard nothing, but I do not think it is very likely. Lord Beechmont cannot bear the place because of the population the collieries have brought."

"I know. He likes Firshire better, but they don't—the girls, I mean, and Lord Rootley."

"What is he like?"

"Very handsome, but very stiff and solemn and dull. I'm sure he'd be a man after Miss Netherleigh's own heart."

"Dear me, Eve, you look quite excited."

"Well, it does make me angry to think of him. He had the impertinence to find fault with me last year."

"What about?"

"It was at a water-party at Maidenhead; of course, you know, one hardly goes to a thing of that sort to sit prozing by one's chaperon all day, and Aunt Louisa never expected me to do it. But Lord Rootley chose to think I ought, and was quite disagreeable because I went on the water alone with George Millington."

"But, Eve, surely you should not."

"There was no harm, and it was no business of his. By-the-by, Iris, do you row?"

"No."

"I do capitally. I must get mummy to let me have a canoe: it'll be something to do, and if Hildegarde Becher only comes we can have races."

"I think mother would be frightened."

"Tell me," said Eve, abruptly changing the subject, "what do you do at Miss Netherleigh's afternoons?"

"Have tea and talk."

"Is it indoors or in the garden?"

"In the garden, if it is fine."

"Then there is lawn-tennis?"

"Sometimes. I don't think many people care for it."

"Do you play?"

"No; somehow it always seems to me so undignified to go rushing about till one gets hot and red."

Eve did not reply. When they got home Iris was astonished to hear what a sparkling account her sister gave of their afternoon. She

had had no idea that Eve had observed so much of the different people as it was evident from her remarks that she had done, and she cheerfully allowed to herself that she could not have made half so amusing a story out of their expedition as Eve did. It was true that her observations were seldom kind, and sometimes very much the reverse, still it was impossible not to laugh both at the matter and the manner of her speech, though Mrs. Pleydell interposed occasionally to deprecate unkind jests and harsh judgments.

When Eve appeared with her mother and Iris at Miss Netherleigh's on the ensuing afternoon, she looked so pretty and her manner was so fascinating, that she took the company by storm. Mrs. Pleydell, watching her, and looking at her innocent, childish face and almost kittenish ways, could hardly believe that she had heard from her lips only the day before sentiments of such cold, worldly wisdom. Surely she thought the child must have caught them up like a parrot, and merely repeated her aunt's opinions without in the least realising

what they meant. This was a great comfort: she began to breathe more freely, and to watch with pleasure her pretty child's evident success.

The garden behind Miss Netherleigh's house had not a great many flowers, what there were being confined to old-fashioned borders round the square enclosure. In the centre of the broad expanse of velvet turf was a stately cedar, and under it the tea equipage and the majority of the chairs were disposed. The old red brick house looked well, its weather-stains partly hidden by the wistaria and the Gloire de Dijon roses that almost covered it. There was a tolerably large gathering, considering that, it being the end of May, several of the neighbouring families were in town; but Miss Netherleigh's Thursdays were always popular. Eve soon persuaded some of the party to get up a set of lawn-tennis, and Iris, as she watched her graceful movements, could not help thinking that there was no danger of her growing so unbecomingly hot and so desperately red as the majority of the Bannerton young

ladies. After the tennis was over, it was not very long before the sounds of music were heard from the house, and on investigation it proved that Eve, having discovered that some of the girls and of the officers could sing, had seated herself at the piano, and was superintending a sort of amateur rehearsal of "H.M.S. Pinafore." Gradually all the company grouped themselves round the window to listen: it was quite a new idea, and was very taking. The Bannerton young ladies generally sang sentimental songs of a somewhat dreary character, and this was a most refreshing variety. Even the bishop condescended to pronounce it a success, and was heard more than once to hum the refrain of "Buttercup" during the afternoon. Mrs. Pleydell had looked anxiously at Miss Netherleigh, doubtful as to how she might regard such an innovation; but it had been such an unequivocal success that Aunt Rachel was decidedly pleased, and even thanked Eve when she was leaving for having started the idea.

Eve chattered incessantly the whole evening

about the different incidents of the afternoon, but it was not till they went up to bed that she followed her sister into her room.

“Iris, who was that handsome man who put you into the carriage?”

“That? Oh, Mr. Furnivall of Rookwood.”

“Do you know him well?”

“Oh, yes, very well indeed!”

“Do you like him?”

“Oh, yes! I think everyone does.”

“Iris, you are very cold. Why, it’s as clear as daylight that he’s awful spoons on you.”

CHAPTER V.

Home-keeping youths have ever homely wits.

Two Gentlemen of Verona—Act i, Sc. 1.

I am not what I was : since yesterday
 My food forsakes me, and my needful rest ;
 I pine, I languish, love to be alone ;
 Think much, speak little, and in speaking sigh.
 When I see Torrismond, I am unquiet,
 And when I see him not, I am in pain.

Spanish Friar. DRYDEN.

LAURENCE FURNIVALL fully merited Eve's description of a very handsome man. He was between seven and eight and twenty, tall, with broad shoulders, and a look of great strength, fair, though much sunburnt, and with close, curling, wavy hair. A physiognomist might perhaps have demurred somewhat to the

full, rather self-indulgent looking lips and the slightly receding chin, and might have thought that the high forehead would have been improved by an accession of breadth; but the defects were slight, such as hardly to strike any but a very thoughtful observer, and, as such are rare, Laurence Furnivall was universally pronounced eminently handsome. He was popular too, despite a shade of *hauteur* in his manner, which gave the impression that he wished people to remember that the master of Rookwood was a personage of considerable importance. He certainly was so in his own estimation. His father had died when he was a year old, and his mother, who had been a distant cousin of her husband's, of an extremely impoverished branch of the family, was so impressed with the grandeur of Rookwood, that she brought up her son to believe it to be one of the finest places in England, and himself one of the most important of the county magnates. Of course she recognized Lord Beechmont's pre-eminence, but he so seldom visited Coalshire that his existence was, socially, almost

forgotten, and Laurence Furnivall had few rivals. Rookwood was undoubtedly a very fine place. It was an old Elizabethan house filled with richly-carved oak, old family portraits, old armour, and priceless china, and Venetian glass. It had a picture-gallery which was one of the sights of the county, and a music-room with a magnificent organ. And the grounds were worthy of the house; from the stiff, formal garden with cut yew hedges, and the terraces where the peacocks sunned themselves on the balustrades, to the "pleasance" where old-fashioned flowers grew in lavish profusion, and the oak-glades of the park where the deer browsed among the brake, and glimpses were obtained of the Banner which skirted the domain and of the distant Rockshire hills.

Mrs. Furnivall might easily be pardoned for her pride in the place, but her son shared it to a perhaps almost unfortunate degree. He seldom left Coalshire. In London, where he would have found his level, and learnt that, though he might be a rich man and the proprietor of a fine old place, there were plenty of other people

in equally, if not even more fortunate circumstances, he was not at his ease. He was accustomed to being a person of such great importance in his own sphere, that he was not happy where he was only a mere unit in a social crowd, and liable at any moment to find himself neglected for some one of greater consequence than himself. Of course he did not allow to himself that this was the real reason for his dislike of London life, indeed very probably he was hardly aware that such was the case. He called it both to himself and others a love of home, a dislike to the "frivolity" of a town life, though certainly his days at Rookwood were hardly remarkable for any great intellectual activity.

He fancied he read the papers, though he really merely skimmed the smaller paragraphs in them, excepting in the *Field*, over which he fell asleep with praiseworthy regularity every Sunday afternoon. He was a Conservative because his father had been one—because he regarded it as the "gentlemanlike" side; but if questioned as to his political faith, he would

have been very sorely puzzled to give an account of it. He was a kind landlord, but left all the management of the estate to his agent, and interested himself principally, if not entirely, in seeing that his tenants preserved foxes, and sternly repressed poaching proclivities in their labourers. In the winter he never missed a meet of the Coalshire hounds, and was looked to as the certain successor of the present master when failing health should finally compel him to resign. He prided himself on the slaughter at the Rookwood battues being greater than at any others in the county; he preserved the portion of the river on his property with the utmost strictness, and fished a good deal when there was nothing else to kill. Perhaps he was a little apt to talk too exclusively of his exploits with rod and gun, of the races he had ridden, and the feathered fowls he had slaughtered. But then it must be remembered that he was absolutely destitute of other topics of conversation. It may be safely asserted that he had not opened a book since he left Oxford, where he had by no means distin-

guished himself. His method of reading the papers has been already described, and he neither knew nor cared anything about art, and only knew enough of music to enable him to dance in time. He was an accomplished cricketer, an adept at lawn-tennis, a first-rate shot, a splendid rider, and excellent dancer ; in short, he was a capital specimen of a healthy and hearty young Englishman, but not a particularly intellectual companion. He had a very good temper when nothing put him out, but he had been too much accustomed all his life to being the first object with everyone around him, to bear the inevitable small troubles of the world very patiently. He was generous, though it was apt, perhaps, to be rather too much after the manner of a beneficent sovereign dispensing favours.

In short, it was Laurence Furnivall's misfortune that his life was somewhat out of focus, he and his concerns looming so large as to overpower and dwarf some even of the weightier affairs of the world. The best thing for him would have been to have lived a good deal in

the world, to have mixed freely with his equals, and to have learnt that, although his position was a great and an important one, there were plenty of other people who were of infinitely greater consequence than he. He might even have learnt that in some London circles people were welcomed for what they could add to the pleasure and amusement of the company, and not for either their wealth or social importance. It was a lesson that it would have taken him some time to learn, and he never gave himself the opportunity of acquiring it. His first experience of London had been distasteful because he did not there find himself a person of pre-eminent importance, as he was at Rookwood, and he never made another attempt to enter it.

For this his mother was both sorry and glad. Mrs. Furnivall was a very proud woman, and all the affection she possessed was concentrated on her only child. During his minority she had had complete control of the estate, and though, when he came of age, she relinquished all interference, she still felt herself every inch the

mistress of Rookwood. Theoretically, she was extremely anxious that her son should marry; she really believed herself that such was her greatest desire; practically she disliked and distrusted any girl to whom he ever said a civil word. To her view no one was worthy of him. She had considerable ambition, and would have liked him to marry a woman of the highest rank; yet, if he had done so, she would have been troubled by an uneasy suspicion that the lady so honoured perhaps did not realise how unspeakably fortunate she was—might even—dreadful thought!—conceive that the condescension was on her side. Mrs. Furnivall's views were even more hopelessly out of perspective than were her son's: Eton and Oxford had given him certain vague ideas that there were others in the world as great as he; she had lived at Rookwood, and thought of its glories till she believed it to be the centre of the universe. Hitherto he had given her but little anxiety: once or twice he had admired some unusually good rider to hounds in a way that had caused her to subject the

young lady in question to considerable scrutiny when they next met, but nothing had ever come of it. He had lost sight of the damsel in the summer, and by the next hunting season he had forgotten her existence, and was ready to admire and make his mother uneasy about somebody else.

Besides her heartfelt belief that no one was worthy of her son, Mrs. Furnivall would have sorely disliked to give up her own position as mistress of Rookwood. Before her marriage she had been nobody, only the youngest daughter of a poor and struggling doctor, a member of a distant branch of the family, and, like all those who have never in their youth been accustomed to importance, she valued it all the more highly from being unused to it. She would not have admitted it even to herself, but the day when her son's wife took her place at Rookwood, and she was compelled to subside to the lower level of the Dower House, would be a bitter one for her. And yet she conscientiously believed that she wished above all things that Laurence

should marry—if he chose a wife who was suitable according to her views.

Hitherto she had had no suspicions of his feelings for Iris, indeed he was by no means certain of them himself. He admired her more than anyone he had ever seen; he liked her stately manners better than those of any of the young ladies with whom he was acquainted, indeed it was perhaps her proud bearing that attracted him, so different was it from the sort of homage and worship to which he was only too well accustomed. Perhaps most men are inclined to imagine themselves Sultans, able to throw the handkerchief where they please; but it was hardly wonderful that Laurence Furnivall, who had had his own importance impressed upon him from his cradle, and since he grew up had found himself universally courted and flattered by mothers and daughters, should be thoroughly imbued with the belief that he had only to ask, and have. Iris was always pleasant to talk to, but she never seemed to hang upon his utterances as others did, and he never observed that

her eyes followed him wherever he moved, as he was perfectly aware that those of many other young ladies were in the habit of doing. He was far more in love with her than he was at all aware of, and it only required some incident that would disturb the ordinary current of their intercourse to open his eyes.

On her side, Iris was nearly as unconscious. It may seem strange that a well-informed and intelligent girl such as she was, interested in literature, art, and all such subjects, which were to him a sealed book, should have fallen in love with anyone so deficient in powers of conversation, excepting on his own especial topics, as was Laurence Furnivall. But women who have no mankind of their own at home, are apt to be somewhat unduly impressed by the manliness of anyone pre-eminent in field sports and athletic exercises. It is such a contrast to anything that they are accustomed to in their home circle, that they are very likely to attach an undue and factitious importance to achievements they can never hope to emulate, and indeed bare-

ly understand. Then, too, Iris only met Laurence in society, or when he called at the Gate House, which was but seldom, for morning visiting was not, as he would have said, "at all in his line," and by no means fathomed that the topics on which he exclusively discoursed were the only ones of which he had the slightest knowledge. That anyone could live absolutely without books had never even dawned on her comprehension, and when Laurence showed himself curiously ignorant of some political fact or remarkable occurrence, she always imagined that his plea of "having really no time to read the papers thoroughly," implied that all his time and attention were given to the management of his estate, for he really persuaded himself that he did everything, which was in fact the work of his very excellent agent.

And so she had gone on, growing gradually and quite unconsciously to care more and more for him, though not understanding why any ball or other gathering from which he happened to be absent seemed so very dull, until Eve's

unceremonious announcement, "Mr. Furnivall is awful spoons on you!" seemed to rend the scales from her eyes. Mechanically she exclaimed that Eve was talking ridiculous nonsense, but that damsel nodded her head sagaciously, and observed that she could not help having eyes. Then Iris fell back on an entreaty to her sister to curb her inclination for talking slang, representing anew how both their mother and Aunt Rachel disliked it. But when Eve, who was not fond of being found fault with, had taken her departure, Iris sat down to consider what she had said.

Eve would have been astonished and incredulous if she could have seen the condition of her sister's mind. To her the idea of anyone being in love with her would have brought no such consternation as it did to Iris; indeed she regarded it rather as the normal state of affairs, and was quite prepared to make the most of the humorous side of it.

Iris was some time before she could collect her thoughts. The words had revealed to her the state of her own heart, and she could not

have told which perturbed her most, the knowledge that she cared for Laurence, or the wonder whether Eve could possibly be right—whether indeed it was true he cared for her. She went over every incident of their meetings; startled, now that her consciousness had once been aroused, to find how accurately she remembered every word and look, but she told herself that she could by no means come to a decision. Really, so deep in her heart as to be unacknowledged, lay the conviction that Eve was right, that Laurence Furnivall's manner to her was different, how she could not tell, from what it was to others. Her cheeks crimsoned as she wondered whether it were possible that she too could have been different to him, whether she had given any involuntary sign of the love of which till that night she had been unconscious.

The thought was distressing, and poor Iris had little rest, for whenever sleep seemed about to visit her eyes, some fresh phase of the problem presented itself to her. And at the end she was no nearer a solution than when she

began. All she could determine was that, now that her eyes had been opened, she would keep the strictest possible watch over herself, and allow no symptom of her feelings to escape her.

Eve was much disappointed to find that Iris could not by any means be provoked into talking of Laurence. To her view a love-affair was very little "fun" if it was not talked about; and she said crossly that her sister was very disagreeable. But Iris simply could not talk; her heart was throbbing with her newly-awakened hopes, and it would have seemed sacrilege to her to jest about the matter as Eve would so gladly have done.

It was also a dreadful blow to Eve to find that her mother by no means intended her to idle about doing nothing, which, in default of more exciting amusement, she would have liked to do. Certainly Mrs. Pleydell found the prosecution of her younger daughter's education a task of Herculean difficulty. Eve had a way of disappearing when wanted, and of declaring innocently, when captured, that she had

only gone into the garden, "just for one minute, to get dear mummy a rose," that was intensely aggravating; and when securely planted in a chair, and given a book to read aloud, she would stop, often in the middle of a sentence, and make some remark so foreign to the subject as to show that, if her eyes had been on the page before her, her thoughts had been far away. Mrs. Pleydell had a sweet temper and infinite patience, but she often felt inclined to despair. She tried making Eve read the same chapter over and over again till she could answer questions on it, but the result of the plan was not encouraging. It was all the same to Eve whether she read straight through the book or never progressed beyond the first chapter; all was equally uninteresting to her, and she hoped that by obstinately refusing to learn she might tire her mother out.

She was much more seriously disturbed by the interference in her toilette. Mrs. Pleydell insisted on alterations being made in her ball-dress before the officers' dance, and when Eve

protested with tears against "being made a dowdy of, her dresses came from Madame Lamothe and were exactly right, just what everyone wore," she was told quietly but decidedly that she would either wear a dress which her mother considered decent or stay at home; she might do which she pleased. Of course Eve went; but she pouted and lamented herself, and was utterly intractable during the whole of the day before. She revived wonderfully, however, when she was once in the ball-room under the universal admiration which she excited. Mrs. Pleydell, who thought that Iris's beauty was of a far higher type and admired her infinitely more, was astonished to see what a *fureur* Eve created. She did not sufficiently take into consideration the difference of the two girls. Iris was proud and stately, and was rather apt to prefer the partners who could really talk (with the exception of course of Laurence) to those who could only dance, and the latter were somewhat inclined to resent her preference. There was not a shadow of difficulty in talking to Eve: she only cared for

trifles, was exceptionally ready to be amused, and talked the fashionable *argôt* that gave her partners a comfortable feeling of *camaraderie*. Before she had been in the room half an hour she had promised more dances than she could have got through in a week, and there was certainly no question that she was a social success.

Laurence Furnivall valsed with her and acknowledged that she danced like a fairy, but she did not please him, for she laughed at him twice and did not seem to be impressed by his importance. His mother, watching with anxiety what his opinion might be of the new beauty suddenly raised to such a pinnacle of popularity, felt much re-assured when he confided to her that Miss Pleydell was a pretty little thing, but not at all his style, very pert and conceited. Of danger from Iris Mrs. Furnivall never dreamed; her son had been acquainted with her now for four years, and if anything were to have come of it, it would have done so ere this. Besides, Iris neither rode to hounds, nor played lawn-tennis, and those were the two

things that Laurence always admired in girls, and Mrs. Furnivall, who was not addicted to psychological problems, never considered that contrast is to the full as often productive of love as similarity of views.

Mrs. Pleydell was surprised, and not a little dismayed, to find that after this dance there was seldom a day that two or more of the officers did not find their way to the Gate House. What could it be, she wondered, that made Eve so attractive? Her conversation when she heard it—which was, however, but seldom, for Eve had a wonderful knack of quietly withdrawing her special cavalier to some distance for a *tête-à-tête*—was of the most trifling description and terribly interspersed with slang. Mrs. Pleydell had lived for so many years at Bannerton out of the reach of the fashionable world that she was not at all *au fait* of the manners of the day, nor aware how very few ideas, eked out with exclamations from burlesques and comic operas, can be made to suffice for a whole afternoon's conversation. The visitor who was talking to her and Iris often

cast longing glances towards the distant sofa whence issued peals of laughter, and would evidently have exchanged places with his comrade with infinite satisfaction.

All through the summer the neighbourhood of Bannerton was unusually gay. Mrs. Pleydell called it positive dissipation, but she was not sorry that things should so have happened. She realized that Coalshire must be a great change to Eve after the gay life she had led in Hyde Park Gardens, and hoped that country gaieties might gradually acclimatise her, so that in a short time she might not find the atmosphere of home dull.

After deliberating for some time as to whether she should write to Tom Pleydell or not, Mrs. Pleydell had made up her mind to do so, and had sent to her nephew the substance of what Eve had said of her views as to matrimony and money. In return she had a reply, sorrowful yet hopeful :

“Eve always does make the worst of herself,” wrote Tom : “to hear her sometimes you would think she was a mercenary old woman of sixty

instead of the soft, sweet, loving little creature she is. I cannot, I will not, give up hope, and yet I fear it may be a vain one, for years must elapse before I shall be in a position to ask her, and how can I be so presumptuous as to hope she will wait for me? Still even the hope is something, and I cannot relinquish it till I am absolutely forced to do so."

Mrs. Pleydell sighed as she read the letter. Much as she wished to see Eve's character in the most favourable light she could not take Tom's view of it. Fascinating and sweet she certainly could and often did appear, but beneath it all her mother feared lay a hard stratum of worldliness and love of wealth. She could only hope that Tom might prove more right than she.

CHAPTER VI.

Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.

Henry IV.—Part 1, Act iii, Sc. 3.

An assignation sweetly made

With gentle whispers in the dark.

FRANCIS.

THE summer was an unusually fine one, and, as we have said, there were more dances, garden-parties, and picnics than was at all usual in the neighbourhood of Bannerton. But nevertheless Eve Pleydell was dismally discontented, and bitterly contrasted this summer with the delights of the last which she had spent in Hyde Park Gardens. She soon determined, however, that it was of no use to complain: her mother gave her but scant sympathy,

telling her that she might think herself fortunate to make her first acquaintance with Coalshire when it was so unusually gay; while Iris wondered openly how she could possibly want any more dissipation. Evidently lamentation was of no avail, though Eve thought her case a grievous one that fully deserved it; but she was in some ways of an eminently practical turn of mind and not at all disposed to waste her power. Finding that complaints of dulness were of no avail, she took up the caressing line, and played her part so well that Mrs. Pleydell was soon persuaded that she was becoming quite reconciled to the life at the Gate House, and especially devoted to herself. It did not strike her as possible, indeed it never occurred to her, that a child like Eve would be capable of acting a part and professing affection and contentment so as eventually to gain her own ends.

Eve fully intended to weave the web of her coaxing ways so closely round her mother as to enable her to obtain whatever she required. Already she had had some little success. She

had begged so earnestly to be allowed to have a canoe that, after much demur, and after having received from Mrs. William Pleydell an assurance that Eve was quite accustomed to rowing and was considered a first-rate oarswoman, Mrs. Pleydell consented; not, indeed, to a canoe, but to a light boat, in which the girl spent a great deal of her time. It was not very lively, she said to herself, still it was better than sitting in the drawing-room and having to read dull books, or than going to see the poor people as Iris was made to do. Nothing could persuade Eve that Iris felt any pleasure in such visits: they would have been odiously disagreeable to her, therefore she judged that they must of course be so to everyone else. She was greatly disappointed at being able to extract no "fun" out of the relations between Iris and Laurence Furnivall. Of his sentiments she had no doubt, and she longed to tease him, but she seemed to Laurence hardly conscious enough of his importance, and he talked to her less than to anyone else, while Iris merely met any observations on the subject with the

remark that "Eve was a silly child, and talked of things she did not understand."

As to one thing that was required of her, Eve absolutely rebelled; she would not go out to dinner.

"I didn't care for it much even in London," she said, piteously; "though there, of course, people are reasonable, and don't ask a girl without a young man to match her. But here—it is too awful to be borne. I have dined out three times, and each time I have been sent down with an old clergyman; the first talked to me about the bishop's charge till I asked him how much powder there was in it, and then he looked as if he thought I was mad, and never spoke to me again; the second could talk of nothing but 'Gregorians' and all sorts of chants, and always went back to them, no matter what I tried to talk about; and the third talked geology, and bored me worse than any of them. No, mummy darling, don't ask me to go through it again. Iris is an angel, I suppose, and doesn't mind dulness. I'd rather go to bed."

And so, when Iris and her mother went to dinner-parties, of which, as is usual in cathedral towns, there were a good many, Eve stayed at home, and generally spent the evening on the river. Innocently enough at first, but it was not very long before she had an adventure.

From the moment the boat had made its appearance, Mrs. Pleydell had issued a decree that Eve was never, under any circumstances, to go down the river in the direction of the town. This was rather a grievance, for Eve thought that in that direction she might encounter some of the officers, who were rather fond of boating, but seldom got so far up the river as the Gate House. Though by the road Bannerton was only three miles off, the manifold windings of the river caused the distance by water to be more than ten. Still the order was not disobeyed, and Eve tried to console herself for the dulness of her enforced solitude by the thought that all this quiet practice would enable her to shine doubly whenever she was again fortunate enough to have an audience.

On the evening in question Mrs. Pleydell and

Iris had gone to dine at the Palace, and shortly after their departure Eve set off in her boat. It was a lovely evening in the first week in August, but its beauty was completely lost upon her. Excepting that she delighted in warmth, and was glad it did not rain, because it would have kept her at home, neither beauty of weather nor of scenery had the slightest effect upon her. She hardly saw the thickets of golden iris or delicate arrowhead which fringed the banks, and looked with perfect indifference at the silvery water-lilies which studded the quiet reaches of the river as she got within the shade of the woods of Beechmont.

Iris would have been enchanted with the lovely beech glades, the golden August evening sun throwing dark shades across them, and touching the silvery boles with a mysterious radiance. Eve saw nothing of it; she was practising what she called "spurts," rowing as hard as she possibly could. She felt unusually energetic that evening, and, almost without perceiving it, went considerably farther up the

river than she had ever done before. As was often the case in her solitary expeditions, she had begun to dream, not exactly the romantic dreams common to young girls, but of the time when she might go back to Mrs. William Pleydell, and begin to live again. Eve hardly understood that her mother really meant that she was never to go back to her aunt; she thought that her happiness was only under a temporary eclipse. And thus dreaming of the delights of a return to London, of all she would do, and how she would enjoy herself, she neglected to observe where she was going, and ran full speed into an intricate thicket of flags. It seemed as if it would be very easy to get out again, but such was not the case; in fact, the boat was fast on the mud, and the impetus of the pace at which Eve had been going had fixed it there firmly.

Here was a dilemma! There was not a human being in sight; at that time in the evening a passer-by was hardly to be hoped for; indeed that part of the river being very lonely, days might pass without anyone coming in sight.

To wade to shore was impossible: the place where she was fixed was a small eyot in the middle of the river; there was deep water between it and the shore, and she could not swim. Whatever should she do? Every endeavour to get the boat off seemed only to imbed it the more firmly. It seemed a desperate case, and Eve felt that not only was it very disagreeable, but that it would make her mother nervous and very probably induce her to forbid any more boating. The idea made her desperate, and, forlorn as the hope seemed of anyone hearing her, she shouted as loudly as she could,

“Help! help!”

At first there was no reply, but when she once more raised her voice she fancied she heard a shout in answer. She tried again, and now there was no doubt that she was answered, and that the voice was drawing nearer. After a very few minutes, though they seemed to Eve an hour, a figure appeared on the nearest bank. The sun had set, and, though the moon had risen, the light was not so clear as to show Eve distinctly

what manner of man he was. Still he was a man, and that at the moment was all she cared for.

“What is the matter?” he called out.

“I am stuck in the mud, and can’t get my boat off.”

“Wait a minute and I’ll come to you,” and he disappeared.

It seemed an age, but it really was only about ten minutes till he re-appeared in a large boat close to her.

“We must make this boat fast to yours,” he said, suiting the action to the word, “and you had better get into my boat to lighten yours as much as possible.”

Eve complied, and he assisted her into his boat. Now that they were at close quarters she could see that he had the appearance of a gentleman. He was very tall and dark, and wore a sort of yachting suit of serge. More she had not time to observe before she was fully occupied in watching his endeavours to get her boat off. The mud must have been very holding, for it was a matter of considerable diffi-

culty ; but at length it was accomplished, and the little boat once more floated free upon the river.

“Oh! thank you so very, very much,” said Eve: “it is so very good of you! What should I have done if you had not been near?”

“You would have passed the night on the mud most assuredly. I hope you have not far to go; it is rather late for you to be in so lonely a part of the river.”

“Oh! I can row a great pace, and it is all down stream. I live at the Gate House, close to Beechmont.”

“You have a long row before you. May I accompany you part of the way, to make sure you have no further adventures?”

“Let us race!” exclaimed Eve, with delight: “it will make the way seem so much shorter. I beg your pardon, though,” she continued, suddenly remembering that this was an utter stranger. “I have no business to trouble you any more. I can get back quite safe.”

“At least let me have the pleasure of escort-

ing you a little way," said the stranger, assisting her into her boat.

It was a most lovely, still, moonlight night, but Eve thought very little of the silvery landscape and the dark shadows of the trees which would have delighted Iris. She was far more interested in the encomiums lavished by the stranger on her rowing, and was soon chattering away to him as if he were an old acquaintance. Swift rowing and the rapid stream brought them near the Gate House sooner than Eve could have believed possible. Then she paused.

"Don't mind, but please I'd rather you didn't come any further," she said. "I daren't say anything about an adventure, or I shall never be allowed to go out again, and it's almost the only thing that keeps me alive in this dull place."

"I understand. But surely you will not forsake the upper reaches of the river? May I not hope that you will visit them again?"

"I daresay I shall. I shall want to see what that eyot looks like in broad daylight."

"Then I shall be on the watch. Good night, Miss Pleydell."

"How do you know my name?" cried Eve in astonishment.

"I sometimes go to Bannerton, and few who do could help knowing the lovely Miss Pleydell by sight. Do not be afraid, however, I am, I assure you, discretion itself, and I shall not give the slightest intimation of having seen you before when next we meet."

"Oh, thank you so much!" cried Eve, "and you know I've never said half enough, but I'm quite awfully obliged to you for your help. Good-bye!"

"No, *au revoir*," and he took off his straw hat as Eve once more made her boat move rapidly through the water.

It was not till she was seated in the drawing-room awaiting her mother's and sister's return, that she remembered that the stranger had the advantage of her, he knew her name and she had never once thought of asking his. Well! that omission could be remedied when they next met, he had said he would be on the watch

for her when she visited the spot. The proposed concealment of her adventure gave Eve not the slightest uneasiness. She had not a particularly tender conscience, and considered that she, and not her mother, was the proper arbiter of her actions. Such a *rencontre* and the prospect of future meetings gave her quite a pleasing feeling of excitement. The stagnation, as she chose to call it, of her life was broken, there was absolutely an event to look forward to. Certainly the stranger had been very agreeable; Eve by no means objected to decided compliments, and had found the approval expressed of her rowing very pleasant. She was indulging in dreams of future meetings, to which their secrecy gave a decided piquancy, when Mrs. Pleydell and Iris returned.

“Well, Eve, you missed a very pleasant evening. You would not have complained of being bored with old clergymen; there were three of the officers.”

“Which?”

“Captain Barton, Mr. Freeman, and Mr. Loveton.”

“Who took you in, Iris?”

“Mr. Furnivall.”

“Oh!” and Eve gave her sister a look which made Iris colour, “well, I amused myself very nicely; the evening was lovely, and the river delicious.”

“I am really glad,” said Mrs. Pleydell to Iris, as the latter lingered in her room before wishing her good night, “really glad that I was persuaded to allow Eve to have that boat. She seems too experienced for there to be the danger I feared, and really it is the only country pursuit she appears to enjoy. If she can appreciate a lovely evening like this more than talking to those boys from the barracks who always hang about her so, she can hardly be so frivolous as she sometimes seems.”

Iris did not answer. Eve was a problem she could not understand. She was loth to acknowledge, even to herself, that she distrusted her sister; and yet there was always something about Eve that gave her the impression of not being honest and straightforward. After she was undressed she sat pondering over

Laurence Furnivall's utterances that evening till she was suddenly disturbed by the apparition of Eve in her white dressing-gown, with her pale golden hair hanging like a mantle around her.

"Now, Iris, tell me who was there and all the fun."

"I don't know about fun, Eve, I can tell you who was there," and Iris enumerated the names of about twenty people.

"I can exactly see it. Captain Barton took Mrs. Delamare, and they talked of her brother in India, who was at school with him, they always do,—how often they must say the same things! Mr. Freeman took Miss Lancy, and talked about how 'we' mean to play polo at Hurlingham when 'we' go to Hounslow next year. I'm sure I wish they'd do it here and enliven us a little! And Mr. Loveton said to you, 'Your thithter not here to-night, Mith Netherleigh, how ith that? Do let me take you in to dinner ;' and then when Mr. Furnivall was told off to you, he looked unutterable things, and murmured something about '*homme propoth hôteth dithpoth.*'"

“You are right about him certainly,” said Iris, laughing, “as to what the others talked of I cannot gratify your curiosity.”

“And was Mr. Furnivall very devoted?”

“Eve, I do wish you would not talk such nonsense! It is entirely a silly idea of your own, and you talk of it as a reality till you make me feel quite uncomfortable.”

“Is that why you have been so cold to him lately?” said Eve, quickly.

“Cold? What do you mean? I have been exactly as usual.”

Iris spoke calmly, but she was very far from feeling composed. She knew that her manner had never been the same since Eve had first awakened her consciousness of her own feelings. She had striven her very hardest to seem just as usual, but was conscious that she had failed. Laurence’s manner to-night had been more *empresé* than usual—she was far from realizing that her proud, cold bearing was to him an irresistible attraction—and she was already tormenting herself with doubts whether she had not repulsed him almost with rudeness.

If she had it was all owing to Eve's nonsense, and she cordially wished that her sister had refrained from commenting on her affairs, and opening her eyes to the state of her own heart. Determined to change the subject, she said,

"I forgot to tell you the news—the Beechmonts are coming down next week for the autumn."

"That is something like news," cried Eve, eagerly. "Now there will be some one to talk to, for they are sure to have the house full of London people."

"I don't know about that," said Iris, doubtfully. "I don't want to damp your hopes, Eve, but Lady Beechmont has been ill, and they are said to be coming down for quiet."

"They couldn't come to a better place, I'm sure. But I don't think much of that. Lady Beechmont's almost always fancying that she's ill, and going somewhere for quiet, but it never makes any difference."

"Poor thing! that seems hard upon her."

' Iris, I wonder if you are really stupid, or

whether it is that you won't understand! Lady Beechmont is as well as I am, but she always makes what Aunt Louisa called a plaything of her health, and when she says she is ill it generally only means she is bored. She would *die* here without the house full."

"Well, Eve, we can talk about it to-morrow. I am very sleepy, and you ought to have been in bed an hour ago."

"Good night," and the sisters parted.

Eve sat and reflected on the news which Iris had just communicated. She was delighted to think that Beechmont would be inhabited; she had seen a good deal of Lady Hildegarde Becher during the previous season, and knew that a great many of her own especial friends were pretty sure to stay at Beechmont during the time that the family spent there. If only they would stay the whole winter! How delightful it would be to see people again to whom it would be possible to talk of something interesting and amusing, and not to be expected to discuss dull books as Iris really seemed to enjoy doing! Of course, she and Hildegarde

should be a great deal together, and Lady Imogene, who was quiet and prosy and did not understand fun, would amuse herself with Iris—they would suit admirably.

On the whole she rather hoped that Lord Rootley would not accompany his family. On their first acquaintance he had paid her great attention, so much indeed that Mrs. William Pleydell had been considerably elated and had pointed out to her niece what an extremely advantageous alliance it would be for her. Eve had willingly acquiesced in the idea,—not that she really cared for him in the very slightest degree, but because the thought of being a rich young viscountess, and able, by reason of being married, to go where she pleased and do what she liked, seemed to her quite too delightful. But when, as their intimacy grew, Lord Rootley presumed to find fault with some of her associates, and even to express his disapproval of some of her own proceedings, her indifference began to take the form of active dislike. Accustomed ever since she had lived with her aunt to be fed on the sugar-plums of

praise and flattery, Eve resented the very mildest expression of disapprobation, and considered Lord Rootley both cross and impertinent. She did fast things because she knew that he objected to them with the sole object of annoying him, but she had such firm faith in the power of her own fascinations that, in spite of her aunt's warnings, she never believed that he would be able to break his chains. In spite of all his disapproval he would propose to her—she would accept him, and when they were married she would soon show him that she meant to go her own way, and not his. But all her calculations were upset by Lord Rootley's conduct.

After the fruitless remonstrance as to her conduct at Maidenhead, of which she had spoken to Iris, he had completely ceased to be her slave and shadow; he still spoke to her every day, and occasionally danced with her, and even called once or twice in Hyde Park Gardens, but by his manner he made it abundantly clear that Eve was no longer his attraction. Mrs. William Pleydell was terribly disap-

pointed, Eve herself unspeakably mortified, the more so as she had done all she could to lure him back, but without result. And now she did not at all look forward with pleasure to his probable presence in Coalshire. Though she told herself, and indeed believed, that she did not care in the very slightest degree for his opinion, still she was uneasily conscious that his eyes fixed upon her when she was doing anything which he disapproved, made her very uncomfortable. Besides she was sure that he would in some way or other spoil her amusement, perhaps might even in some way interfere with her interviews with the mysterious stranger of the river.

If a turn had not been given to her thoughts by Iris' "news respecting the Beechmonts," Eve would probably have dwelt far more upon her evening's adventure than was actually the case. Her principal interest in it had been the prospect of a break in what she chose to consider the deadly monotony of life at the Gate House, and the prospect of a house full of London acquaintances deprived it of much of its charm.

Still Beechmont was not yet inhabited, some time might still elapse before the family arrived and the guests assembled : during that interval, at any rate, the stranger might prove a source of amusement. Eve always enjoyed a secret, and, though the primary reason of her silence was the dread of her boating excursions being prohibited, she yet felt that her acquaintance was all the pleasanter and more exciting from being a mystery. She felt sure that the hero of her adventure was a gentleman ; she had seen enough of him in the moonlight to induce a suspicion that he was very handsome, he had made himself very agreeable, and, sure passport to Eve's good graces, he had paid her a compliment by speaking of her as the beautiful Miss Pleydell. Yes, there was decidedly some enjoyment to be got out of the accidental acquaintance, and Eve began almost to hope that Hildegarde Becher's keenness about rowing might somewhat have subsided ; she would prefer for the present having the upper reaches of the river to herself.

It was long before Eve went to sleep, so occupied was she with arranging all the enjoy-

ment she was to have at Beechmont, and also the details of her meetings with the stranger. When at length she did so it was to dream of boats entangled in thickets of flags and bul-rushes, and of assistance offered by handsome strangers, who, however, on nearer inspection had a tantalizing way of turning into Lord Rootley.

CHAPTER VII.

How far your eyes may pierce, I cannot tell,
Striving to better, oft we mar what's well.

King Lear.—Act i, Sc. 4.

Know when to speak ; for many times it brings
Danger, to give the best advice to kings.

Aphorism 254. HERRICK.

EVE was restless the next morning, longing to set forth in her boat, and yet not liking to start too early. Never had the two hours of steady reading, or the hour's practising which her mother insisted upon, seemed so irksome, and she welcomed luncheon-time with unusual relief. After that she would be free. But such was not to be the case. Mrs. Pleydell announced at luncheon that she was going to drive to

Allanton, a place about seven miles off, to call on a newly-married couple, a Mr. and Mrs. Vaughan who had arrived there, and that she wished both girls to accompany her. Eve's countenance fell.

"You'll let me off, mummy, won't you?" she said, in her most coaxing and persuasive manner; "it is *such* a lovely day for the river."

"My dear child, you really must not ride your pet hobby quite to death. No, you had the whole evening on the river yesterday, and will be all the better for a rest to-day."

"It will be so hot and dusty driving," said Eve, pouting.

"Not so hot as it would be on the river in this blazing sun; I declare it would be enough to give you sunstroke! No, we shall go principally through the forest, and it will be delightfully shady. I don't think you have ever been that road, and it is very pretty."

"I don't want to go. You and Iris will be quite enough; why can't you let me enjoy myself in peace?"

"Eve," said her mother, gravely, "that is not

a proper way to speak. I wish you to drive with me to-day, and I don't choose that you should upset the arrangements I have made. Go and get ready at once, and do not let me have to say any more about it."

Eve's sulkiness showed itself in the slowness with which she made her toilette. She knew her mother disliked the carriage to be kept waiting, and dawdled until the horses had been standing in the shade of the great walnut-tree fully half an hour, in the hope that Mrs. Pleydell would become impatient and not wait for her.

But such was not the case. Her mother came to her room, and waited with a determined patience till she was at length ready and there was no further hope of escape. It was with a very bad grace and sulky countenance that Eve took her place in the barouche.

The drive was a lovely one, leading as it did through a portion of the forest that on one side stretched to within a few miles of Bannerton. But beautiful as it was, grateful as was the thick shade of the fine old oaks on this

blazing August afternoon, Eve refused to admire anything.

“She did not care for trees,—there was no air away from the river,” was all she would say, and at length Mrs. Pleydell signed to Iris to leave her alone, and the mother and daughter whose thoughts and tastes were in unison, addressed their conversation to each other. This was a fresh offence to Eve, who disapproved of being ignored, and when she followed her mother and Iris into the drawing-room at Allanton her face was like a thunder-cloud. But it cleared as if by magic, for there were several visitors there before them, among them two or three of the officers from Bannerton, and Eve had no idea of allowing her bad temper to be suspected out of her own family circle. In a moment she was as brilliant and as fascinating as usual, and Iris looking at her in astonishment, almost wondered if this animated dimpling little face could possibly be the one which had looked so sulky opposite to her in the carriage.

Mrs. Vaughan soon proposed an adjournment

to the garden ; two or three more guests arrived, among them Laurence Furnivall and his mother, and when Mrs. Pleydell at length took her leave, Eve was loth to go, having greatly enjoyed a flirtation with Captain Deverell conducted under colour of gathering and eating nectarines. She had quite forgotten her disappointment about the boat ; she had been flattered and admired, and that was always enough to raise her to a pinnacle of satisfaction. She was chatting away gaily as they drove home, when suddenly, emerging from one of the glades of the forest, appeared the hero of her boating adventure, mounted on a very handsome bay mare. If either Mrs. Pleydell or Iris had been looking at Eve they must have perceived that she blushed and looked embarrassed ; but they were too occupied with wondering who the stranger could be to observe her.

“What a good-looking man and what a lovely horse !” said Iris.

“It is no one belonging to the neighbourhood. I wonder who he is ?” said her mother.

“Perhaps some one taking a riding tour.”

“Perhaps. Well, at any rate it is nothing to us.”

The stranger had let the carriage pass without the faintest sign of recognition, but when it was safely past, and he could only be seen by Eve, who was seated with her back to the horses, he took off his hat and made her a low sweeping bow. Of course she could not return it, and he evidently did not expect her to do so, for the instant he had given his salutation, he turned his horse and disappeared. So after all he had not expected and waited for her on the river! Eve was sensible of a decided feeling of mortification. All through her sulky drive to Allanton she had been drawing mental pictures, highly flattering to herself, of the impatience with which he was doubtless awaiting her possible appearance, and it was too disappointing to have incontrovertible proof that he had not expected her at all. Eve felt positively disgusted, and almost registered a vow that she would not pursue her adventure by revisiting the eyot. The recollection of the afternoon spent under the nectarine-trees at

Allanton was more flattering to her vanity, and she quickly reverted to the contemplation of it.

Something in Laurence Furnivall's manner to Iris had for the first time struck his mother ; and, as they drove back to Rookwood in his mail phaeton, she was unusually silent, considering what course it would be best for her to pursue. As we have said, while theoretically desiring that he should marry, firmly believing indeed that such was her fondest wish, she yet never saw him pay any girl the slightest attention without at once discovering that she was the very last person that he ought to marry. So it was in the present case. Iris would have appeared to most people a most unexceptionable girl for a young man to fix his affections upon : beautiful, of excellent family, well-bred and refined, it would have been difficult to imagine what more a mother could desire ; but Mrs. Furnivall, full of what she really believed to be maternal anxiety for her son's welfare, but in reality jealous of any threatening of the downfall of her supremacy at Rookwood, thought

otherwise. There was really no objection that she could formulate against Iris herself, excepting the vague and intangible one that she "was quite sure she would not in the least suit Laurence," why, she would have been sorely puzzled to define; so she fell back on the "dreadful disgrace" of Mrs. Pleydell's connection with her bankrupt brother-in-law, and quite persuaded herself that it formed an insuperable obstacle between Iris and her son, and that it was her duty to point this out to him "before matters went any farther." But this required to be done with infinite caution. Laurence was decidedly self-willed, and opposition to any of his wishes was very apt to confirm him in his determination to have his own way.

She began with some diplomacy after dinner.

"That little Eve Pleydell certainly is a very pretty little thing."

"Pretty? Yes, I suppose so, but it isn't a style I admire, and she is so pert, there is no dignity about her."

"She seems to have plenty of admirers."

“Oh, yes, plenty. Lots of men like a girl of that sort who takes all the trouble off their hands.”

“Well, poor child, it is well she should be popular, it is her best chance of marrying well, though I am afraid that disgraceful bankruptcy—they call it fraudulent in the papers—will be sorely against her.”

“That would be very hard. It was no fault of hers.”

“No, of course not. But still, hard or not, the fact remains that people are rather shy of connecting themselves with a disgraced family. I am afraid Mrs. Pleydell and her daughters will find it to be the case.”

As she spoke she glanced furtively at her son to see whether the slight accent she had ventured to lay on the word “daughters” had caught his ear. Apparently it had done so, for he coloured slightly, remained silent for a few moments, and then said,

“Even if it injured Miss Pleydell, which I think would be very unfair, it cannot, at any rate, affect Miss Netherleigh—she had nothing

whatever to do with this defaulting bankrupt."

"No-o—of course she has not actually, but still it reflects upon her. Suppose for instance that a man proposed to her, acquaintances who asked about her, and heard that her mother was a Mrs. Pleydell, would be very apt to forget that she did not herself belong to the objectionable family."

"I can't see why they shouldn't be able to remember her name just as well as the other."

"Only somehow people always recollect what it is desirable they should forget."

"Well, I think any man would be a great fool who let himself be put off from marrying a girl he liked because of such a piece of fanciful absurdity."

"Do you? Well, I don't know, it is always disagreeable for a man to feel that there is a possibility of his wife being looked coldly on."

"A man marries to please himself, not a pack of chattering idiots."

"Of course, for his own happiness chiefly and primarily, still whenever he does mix with the

world, it makes things better for him that his wife should be able to take her proper place."

"I can't say I see that people have made the slightest difference to Mrs. Pleydell or her daughters since this business took place."

"No, I don't think they have; it says a great deal for her popularity, I think, that such should be the case. Miss Denford did say the other day that she thought it would have shown better taste if she had refused invitations this summer and stayed at home till the matter had been a little forgotten; but then, as she said, people do see things so very differently. But asking them out here where they are so well known is one thing—it would be so awkward, you see, to omit them—and marrying is quite another."

Laurence sat silent for some minutes, and his mother thought she had probably said quite enough; if she were to say more he might begin to imagine she had been talking with an object, and, if he once did that, all hope of her influencing him would be at once destroyed, so she changed the subject.

"I heard to-day, Laurence, that the Beechmonts arrive the middle of next week. What do you say to having our garden-party and dance the week afterwards?"

Laurence started out of a deep reverie.

"I beg your pardon, mother, I didn't hear what you said."

Mrs. Furnivall repeated her observation.

"It will do capitally. I should like to get it well over before the shooting begins. So the Beechmonts are coming—is Rootley coming too?"

"I don't know."

"I hope he is—he's a sensible fellow and perhaps he'll get his father to hear reason about exchanging some of the partridge ground. It's too aggravating the way in which our land dovetails in some places, and Rootley'll be more likely to understand all about it than his father, who never cared for sport, I believe, even in his best days."

"Not caring about sport," was a heinous offence in Laurence's eyes. He proceeded to talk so very earnestly about the hoped for ex-

change of shooting, that his mother began to think that she had alarmed herself unnecessarily, and to congratulate herself that the reluctance which he had exhibited to agreeing to her proposition that Iris Netherleigh was tainted by any shadow of the Pleydell disgrace, was after all without any strong personal interest. She felt it would be wise to drop the subject, at any rate, for the present.

Mrs. Furnivall would have been considerably disturbed if she could have seen the working of her son's mind as he sat alone in the smoking-room that night. Her remarks respecting Iris were far indeed from having had the effect which she hoped and intended. If she had said nothing, it is very probable that he might have gone on as he had done so long, calmly enjoying and appropriating Iris' society, and almost unconscious of how much he cared for her. But his mother's observations, her assumption that Iris must suffer from her connection with the name of Pleydell, had roused him, had taught him how very much she was to him. As he sat alone that night he wondered how it was that

he had so long delayed the question that he felt he had all along intended to ask, and determined that it should be put without delay. When should it be? It seemed to him that there would be a certain awkwardness in riding over to the Gate House, demanding a private audience of Iris and asking her to be his wife; it would surely appear abrupt after their long acquaintance and his frequent opportunities, and yet it was what he would have preferred doing. Now that his mind was fully awakened to his own wishes, he would have liked to settle the matter off hand. But, besides the awkwardness which would he thought exist, he had an infinity of engagements that would certainly preclude the possibility of his meeting Iris for several days. The next day he was to go to the other side of the country to play in a county cricket match, and would not return till the ensuing week; and then he had made an appointment to go over to a small property of his in Limeshire and meet his agent on business. Then another day he had agreed to go to Rockton to see a horse that sounded likely

to suit him as a hunter. No—there was no chance of his seeing Iris for the next ten days. It seemed really an eternity,—but the idea of giving up one of the engagements, so as the more quickly to decide his fate, never once occurred to him.

Perhaps if he had at all doubted the answer he would receive he might have been in greater haste; but such was not the case. Laurence Furnivall had perhaps not a much higher opinion of his own perfections than is common to his sex, but he had, ever since he grew up, been the object of so many attentions, and had it made so plain to him in various quarters that he had not only to ask and have, but would be met more than half way so as to save him even the trouble of asking, that it is not perhaps astonishing that he had even more than the ordinary belief that he was a sultan privileged to throw his handkerchief where he listed. It was true that Iris had never given him any of these flattering intimations, indeed it was her proud and somewhat cold manner that had at first been her chief attraction for him; still it

never once occurred to him to contemplate the possibility of a refusal. If he had done so he would hardly have been so content to wait, as he at length decided to do, till the day of his mother's garden-party and dance. Then he reflected he should have ample opportunity; after he had done his part in receiving the guests he could stroll with Iris into the more secluded portion of the grounds,—it would be much better, and altogether more pleasant to him than going on a special mission to the Gate House. And so, while Mrs. Furnivall lulled herself to sleep with the satisfactory belief that she had nipped in the bud any nascent danger of her precious son's "throwing himself away" upon Miss Netherleigh, that son, aroused by her words, was arranging to his own satisfaction the time and place for the disappointment of her hopes. Could she have seen his mind she would hardly have slept so calmly.

Lord and Lady Beechmont and their daughters duly arrived on the day appointed, and Eve was pettish and discontented because her mother would neither call the ensuing day nor

permit her to go up to the house to see Lady Hildegarde.

“But, mamma, we were such pals.”

“Such what, Eve?”

“Oh, bother! Mamma, you know quite well I mean friends.”

“It is always as well to say what you do mean, Eve.”

“But why mayn’t I go?”

“Because, my dear, it would be a positive impertinence to invade people the very instant they arrive.”

“But you could call in the afternoon.”

“It would be as bad—I know Lady Beechmont well, but that is no reason why I should take a liberty. Besides, you know very well that it is Aunt Rachel’s day.”

“Surely we might get off for once.”

“Aunt Rachel expects us always, and nothing would make me disappoint her. It is of no use, Eve—you will not go to Beechmont till I think proper.”

Eve’s fair face clouded—it was wonderful how sulky she could look when displeased, and

would have been incredible to her many admirers to whom she carefully exhibited a very different countenance.

'Twice during the days that had elapsed since her adventure she had met the hero of it on the river, and their acquaintance had made considerable progress though she had not yet learnt his name. He paid her the compliments that her vanity loved, and from each interview she had returned more intoxicated than she had ever been before. It had not been without effect on her temper; she had been less tolerant of control, more impatient of her mother's requirements as to reading and music, than she had been for some time, and poor Mrs. Pleydell began to feel almost in despair. She had hoped that, when once the girl grew a little accustomed to the less exciting life which she was now destined to lead, she would become less discontented and prove herself a pleasanter inmate. Surely she must have been very different in Hyde Park Gardens, or Tom Pleydell could hardly have asserted so positively that she was loving and amiable, and disposed to do

herself injustice by her occasional ebullitions of temper. Mrs. Pleydell hardly fathomed even yet that when Eve was pleased and excited, and her vanity flattered, she could appear the most amiable of mortals; nor did she make sufficient allowance for the fact that Tom was desperately in love, and therefore hardly the best judge of Eve's fascinations.

Tom kept up a correspondence with Eve, or, more strictly speaking, he wrote to her pretty regularly, and she—left his letters unanswered. Occasionally he wrote to Mrs. Pleydell, and from these epistles she gathered that he was working very hard in the unaccustomed and distasteful sphere of a clerk, and had reason to hope that he was giving satisfaction to his employers. Eve never evinced the slightest interest in his accounts of himself, beyond the observation that he had been very foolish to give up his own fortune when there was not the slightest necessity for it. Mrs. Pleydell said very little about Eve in her answers to Tom's epistles, but that little was never calculated to encourage the slightest hope. She trusted that gradually

she might induce him to believe that the girl was absolutely indifferent to him.

Eve accorded a very different welcome to the missives that reached her from Mrs. William Pleydell. That lady had sold her house in Hyde Park Gardens to excellent advantage, and had betaken herself to a little known or frequented German spa. It was dismally dull, she wrote, but of course this year, while the catastrophe was still fresh in people's minds, the only thing for her was to efface herself. She hoped to establish herself once more in London in the winter, and if everything went well Eve would of course return to her; she feared she must be terribly moped down in Coalshire, but as matters were at present she would find it quite as dreary in Germany. Eve kept these letters strictly to herself, and answered them at great length; but having one day, when annoyed at some restriction which she considered vexatious, given utterance to some observations as to the happy time when she should go back to dear Aunt Louisa, Mrs. Pleydell thought it better to put an end to such expectations at once; and

not only told Eve in the clearest manner that she would not again return to her aunt, but also wrote very distinctly on the subject to her sister-in-law, stating that she did not think London life with all its excitements was healthy for a girl of Eve's frivolous temperament, and begging that she would not disturb her mind by suggestions of a return to it. Mrs. William was very angry, declaring that her sister-in-law had broken faith with her, that she had allowed her to adopt Eve on the understanding that she was to be hers for ever, and that, if she had ever imagined she should be defrauded of her, the girl should never have returned to Coalshire. She had only allowed her to do so to save her from some unpleasantnesses, which of course were inseparable from her uncle's failure. She wrote in the same strain to Eve, and made the girl more discontented and fractious than she would otherwise have been.

"Iris," said Eve, coming into her sister's room after her mother had finally refused to call at Beechmont that afternoon. "Can you help me? Mummy's so cross to-day;

she won't let me go and see Hildegarde."

"Eve, mamma is never cross."

"No, not to you—you can do just as you like and there's never a word, but I may do nothing I like."

"Eve, you know quite well you are talking nonsense. Mamma is most indulgent to both of us. You know she likes us to employ ourselves in the morning, and you will be sure to see Lady Hildegarde in a day or two. I'm sure it never occurred to me to rush off the first moment they arrived to see Lady Imogene."

"That's not the same thing, you're ever so much older, and besides you haven't seen her for four years."

"All the more reason that I should want to see her again. Now you've seen Lady Hildegarde within as many months."

"Oh, Iris, how can you be so tiresome and stupid? What in the world could you and Imogene have to say to each other? Now Hildegarde can tell me all about everything, how much my friends missed me and who is coming here to stay and all that."

“Well, but as mamma does not wish you to go to-day there is nothing to be done.”

“I thought I could come out with you when you go into the village at twelve. If I went with you mamma wouldn’t mind, and while you were talking to your old women I could just slip up to the house for a quarter of an hour.”

“Do you really think,” said Iris, looking at her in astonishment; “do you for one moment suppose, Eve, that I would help you to deceive and disobey mamma? You surely cannot think what you are saying!”

“You are very cross and disagreeable!” said Eve, bursting into tears; “I wish, oh how I wish that I were back with Aunt Louisa!”

CHAPTER VIII.

Self-love never yet could look on truth,
 But with blear'd beams ; sleek flattery and she
 Are twin-born sisters, and so mix their eyes,
 As if you sever one the other dies.

Cynthia's Revels. BEN JONSON.

Thou who lov'st but what nothing loves,
 And that's thyself.

DRYDEN.

EVE had not very long to wait for a sight of her friend. The very next morning, while with ostentatious inattention she was reading Macaulay's History aloud to her mother—Mrs. Pleydell had begun by allowing her to read to herself, but had soon found that Eve either concealed a novel in the book, or went calmly to sleep, so victimised herself by making her

read aloud,—a ring was heard at the hall-door, and in another moment Lady Hildegarde Becher was announced. Eve threw the book to the other end of the room, sprang up with an exclamation of delight, and welcomed her friend with an ecstatic hug.

It was soon made clear to Mrs. Pleydell that Lady Hildegarde had come to see her daughter, and thought her considerably in the way. She just answered her hostess's questions, but immediately turned again to Eve, and seemed to think it quite a hardship to have to reply to inquiries as to her mother's health. Eve having talked of her as a great beauty, Mrs. Pleydell was considerably disappointed. Her recollection of the girl four years before had been of a pretty child, but she could not admire the bold-looking, loud-mannered young woman whose fair hair had been changed to a dusky red, and was as rough as if it had never made acquaintance with a brush, whose eyebrows were undoubtedly "assisted," and whose eyelids were by no means innocent of kohl. She could not, she thought, be a good friend for Eve, and

began to regret that Beechmont was to be occupied that autumn.

At length, finding that her studious ignoring of her hostess had no effect in causing the latter to retire, Lady Hildegarde affected a sudden admiration for the garden, and in a few moments the two girls were on the lower terrace.

“I thought I was never going to have a word with you!” exclaimed Lady Hildegarde, throwing herself into a seat. “You don’t always sit doing goody in the drawing-room like that, do you?”

“Mummy makes me read aloud : it’s an awful bore, but I can’t help it,” said Eve.

“You poor innocent! Why don’t you strike? But now tell me all about everything. How do you exist here? Is there a creature to speak to besides the stupid old things in the Close? I suppose there must be, or you would have drowned yourself by this time.”

“Oh, yes, there are the officers,” said Eve; “and there is Mr. Furnivall of Rookwood, and two or three others; and we have had some

dances, and garden-parties, and picnics and things. But of course it is very dull after London. Of course you'll have people staying here."

"Of course; you don't think we are going to vegetate by ourselves, though I believe Rootley and Image would like it."

"Oh! then Lord Rootley is coming."

"Yes, more's the pity. We should have much better fun without him. But we're going to have an awfully jolly set down, and he can hardly make head against them all;" and Lady Hildegarde proceeded to retail a list of names that filled Eve's heart with delight, for among them were many of her own special friends. "And you're going to stay here the whole autumn?"

"Unless something happens, or it is too unbearably dull, we shall stay till we go to London in February."

"Delightful! How I hope I shall go back to Aunt Louisa then! Mummy says I shan't, but I should die here all the year round."

"Well, it would be hard lines. I say, do you

keep up your rowing? I've got such a jolly new canoe coming down. Charley Palmer and one or two more will bring theirs, and we can have no end of fun."

"Yes, I've got a boat," said Eve, not quite sure that these aquatic projects suited her views; she thought she would prefer keeping the upper reaches of the river to herself.

"Well, I must be going. Tell me, is there anything coming on—any fun, I mean?"

Eve mentioned one or two parties in prospect, not forgetting the garden-party at Rookwood; and then Lady Hildegarde took her departure without returning to the house.

Mrs. Pleydell looked up as Eve re-entered the drawing-room, and, on perceiving that she was alone, appeared somewhat surprised.

"Is Lady Hildegarde gone?"

"Yes; she couldn't stay any longer."

"Not very good manners, I must say, not to wish me good-bye."

Eve looked astonished.

"But, mummy, she came to see me."

"That is no reason, my dear, why she should

be discourteous to your mother. Lady Beechmont's own manners are so good, I wonder she has not trained her daughter better."

The subject not being pleasant, Eve at once changed it.

"Isn't she lovely, mamma?"

"No, my dear, I can't say I think so. She looks more like a fifth-rate actress than a lady."

Eve looked astonished.

"She's awfully admired."

"It cannot be by anyone with a refined taste. Her hair was a very pretty fair colour, now it is hideous, and her eyes and eyebrows are painted. What can her mother be thinking of!"

"Lord Rootley's always worrying her about her hair and eyes."

"He shows his good sense; it is a pity she does not attend to what he says."

"Oh! he is so fussy and tiresome. She wishes so much he was not coming down this autumn."

"Affectionate certainly towards her only brother."

“Oh, mamma, you don’t know how tiresome and particular he is.”

“Well, it does not seem to keep his sister in order. But come, Eve, there is no reason you should waste any more time. Go on with your reading, you must take your practising in the afternoon.”

“Oh, mummy,” said Eve, as she reluctantly picked up her book, “I want so much to go on the river.”

“There will be ample time for that afterwards,” said Mrs. Pleydell, decidedly, and Eve re-commenced her reading in the voice that irritated her mother almost beyond bearing, showing plainly as it did that the girl was obstinately determined that the sense of what she read should not reach her mind if she could help it.

It really seemed at times as if it were time and trouble thrown away to endeavour to carry on Eve’s education. It was quite clear that, at present, what she read did her no good, for she simply read it like a parrot because she was obliged to do so, and never had an idea of the

sense. Still Mrs. Pleydell was determined to persevere; it was a certain discipline to make Eve do as she was told, and at any rate three hours were abstracted from the perusal of the frivolous literature which was all she cared for.

At lunch Eve chattered away very fast, detailing all Lady Hildegarde had said respecting the guests who were coming to stay at Beechmont, and also about the canoes that were expected.

"We shall have quite a regatta," she exclaimed; "oh, Iris, aren't you awfully sorry you're out of it all? Why, you don't even care for lawn-tennis, and two or three of the best players in London are coming down. We shall have no end of fun."

"No indeed, Eve," said Iris, laughing; "I am very glad you should have what you enjoy, but I feel no wish either to row or to play lawn-tennis more than I do at present. Looking on suits me much better."

"How odd!" said Eve, who, like most shallow-minded people, could not understand a

feeling which she did not herself experience ; “ I suppose it’s having lived in the country so long that makes you so stupid.”

“ For shame, Eve,” said her mother ; “ Iris is by no means stupid.”

“ Oh no, I know she’s a dear old thing,” said Eve, carelessly giving her sister a kiss as she passed her to get some cake.

“ I only wish you were ever likely to know a quarter as much,” continued Mrs. Pleydell.

“ I’m sure I should be very sorry,” exclaimed Eve ; “ people would call me blue, and then men would avoid me.”

What was to be done with the child ? She seemed incorrigible, and her mother gave a sigh almost of despair, and wished, as she had done so often in the last few months, that she had followed Aunt Rachel’s advice and kept her daughter at home. Eve was in a great hurry to get her hour’s practising over. She was less intractable on this score than on that of the reading, still it required constant watchfulness to make her practise steadily, instead of merely playing odds and ends of different airs

that struck her fancy. The moment the hour was over she sprang up.

“Good-bye, mummy! now I’m going to enjoy myself,” and in a very few minutes she could be seen, equipped for the river, running down the terrace steps.

Almost before she was out of sight the doorbell rang, and Lady Beechmont and Lady Imogene were announced.

Lady Beechmont was a tall, delicate, fragile-looking woman, who thought a great deal about her own health, and cared to talk of little else. In reality she was far stronger than she either looked or allowed herself to be considered; indeed, if such had not been the case she would have been quite incapable of enduring all the fatigue which she went through cheerfully in the pursuit of pleasure. She was always well enough to do anything that amused her, or that she liked, though if bored, or not sufficiently entertained, she imagined herself ill and fatigued at once. They had only been a day and a half at Beechmont, and already the want of society was beginning to tell upon her; she

could not endure life alone with her family, it was too devoid of excitement. She had quite caught at the idea of calling on Mrs. Pleydell when it was suggested by Lady Imogene; it must be confessed that until then she had almost forgotten her existence.

“So delighted to see you again,” she said, as she subsided gracefully into a low chair, “it really seems an age! We had quite meant to come back last year, but my wretched health always prevents everything. Dr. Summers insisted on Homburg and Switzerland, and then when we came back we went to Scotland, and in the winter it was so cold we went to Cannes, How well you look! Ah, you don’t know what a trial it is never to know a day’s health.”

“Indeed it must be,” said Mrs. Pleydell, sympathetically, “I am sorry to hear you are such a sufferer. You will enjoy the perfect quiet here;” quite forgetting for the moment all Eve had said about a constant succession of guests.

“Quiet! Oh, my dear Mrs. Pleydell, I could not bear to be alone. My wretched nerves!

I get quite moped without society. We hope to have a few people with us always; some come to-morrow. Will you and your girls dine with us? Your pretty Eve is a great friend of Hildegarde's."

Mrs. Pleydell accepted the invitation, and then said,

"Lady Hildegarde was here this morning. She is a good deal altered since you were here last."

"Ah, yes! grown up, and become a beauty. Ah, dear Mrs. Pleydell, I can't tell you the fatigue of taking out a beauty in London! It was really almost too much for me!"

"Why did you do so much?" asked Mrs. Pleydell, smiling.

"Oh, you see, it is so necessary for a girl at first to be seen at all the right places, so of course I made an effort. And then Hildegarde was wild to go everywhere, so different from Imogene. But your Eve is just the same—it must have been a terrible blow to her, leaving London."

"It was to come home," said Mrs. Pleydell,

with some emphasis; "and really," she continued, in a lighter tone, "the neighbourhood has been unusually gay this year. Iris and I feel quite dissipated, and Eve enjoys her boating very much."

"I hope we shall do something to enliven the neighbourhood," said Lady Beechmont. "I am sure it will not be my fault if we do not, but Lord Beechmont *will* talk as if the object of being in the country was to bury yourself, and see no one, and Rootley is just as bad."

"Is Lord Rootley with you?"

"He comes to-night. Imogene dear, I think we must go. I feel I require a little drive, to revive me;" and, rising with her usual languid grace, Lady Beechmont took her departure.

"I had not a word with Lady Imogene," said Mrs. Pleydell to Iris. "She, at any rate, has not followed the same fashion as her sister. She looks just as she did four years ago."

"She is just as pleasant," said Iris. "She seemed to remember all we did together then,

and promised to show me her drawings. Mamma, is Lady Beechmont really such a great invalid? Eve declares there is nothing the matter with her, but then she sometimes talks fast."

"I think she is right in this instance," returned her mother. "I fancy Lady Beechmont has accustomed herself to be unable to live without excitement, and is almost ill without it, or, at any rate, so dull as to believe herself so, but is always able to do anything that amuses her. It is just the sort of character into which I fancy Eve might grow hereafter. It is for this reason I am so exceedingly anxious to force some rational pursuits upon her."

"I am afraid you don't succeed very well."

"No, indeed; and I am afraid Lady Hildegard will not make matters easier. I don't want the child to think me very strict and disagreeable, but I really cannot allow her to be always running in and out of Beechmont with such a fast set as I feel sure Lady Hildegard's friends will be."

“But they may not be all her friends.”

“She is considered the beauty—how anyone can think so *I* cannot imagine. She really looked quite disreputable—and she is sure to have more weight with her mother than Lady Imogene.”

“We shall see some of them to-morrow night; perhaps they will be better than you expect. I am rather curious to see Lord Rootley. Eve seems to dislike him.”

“I fancy he is too sensible to suit his younger sister. So Eve dislikes him? Mrs. William Pleydell hinted to me last year that he was inclined to pay her a great deal of attention. What did she say about him?”

“He seems to have offended her by finding fault with something she did at a water party.”

“It would not be difficult to offend her that way. Eve does not like being found fault with.”

“No. She says her aunt never did so.”

“No. She spoilt her terribly. Ah, Iris, I see now how wrong I was! I ought to have

listened to Aunt Rachel. What she advises is always right."

"Dear mamma, I am sure you ought not to blame yourself. You did what you thought was right, and what was most kind. You only did what you always do, thought of others instead of yourself."

"I thought so at the time, dear," said her mother, laying her hand for a moment caressingly on her daughter's; "still I see now that I was wrong. I ought not to have delegated my responsibility for my own child to another. Whenever Eve is rebellious, or does what I do not like, I feel as if it were harsh to blame her. It is my own fault that she has ever had an opportunity of learning such ways."

"Dear mamma, don't make yourself unhappy. She will quiet down when she has been with you a little. Indeed, she is quieter now."

"She sees there are some things I will not allow. Eve does not want for quickness. What grieves me most about her is her want of heart."

Iris was silent for a few moments; she hardly

knew how to offer any consolation on this point, for Eve's frank indifference to everything which did not concern herself struck her perhaps even more forcibly than it did her mother. At length she said,

"I don't think she means half she says; she has got into an exaggerated style of talking that she thinks sounds well."

"I wish I could think that was all," said her mother, with a sigh, remembering Eve's very distinct enunciation of her views of life when she had spoken to her respecting Tom Pleydell.

Poor Tom! he wrote to her regularly, and, though he never directly asked her if she thought there was any hope for him, still it was abundantly clear that his whole heart and thoughts were centred upon Eve. In her answers his aunt was most careful to say no word that could by any possibility be construed into encouragement. She hoped that Tom's fancy for the girl, who to her appeared to be still almost a child, might die out, and that he might find some one more worthy of his simple,

loyal nature. There seemed little chance of his changing at present; but then, as she reflected, it was perhaps too soon for him to realise that there really was no hope for him. He had very evidently but a slight knowledge of the girl's nature; it was an ideal Eve—infininitely superior, as Mrs. Pleydell reflected with a sigh, to the real one—with whom he was in love. She would have felt greatly relieved if she could have hoped to open Tom's eyes to Eve's imperfections; but that at present seemed very far indeed from being possible.

She wondered greatly whether the girl had been very different during the time she had spent in Hyde Park Gardens. It almost seemed as if such must have been the case, else surely Tom, who was both shrewd and sensible, and who had known her in all the intimacy of home life, could hardly have been so firmly imbued as was evidently the case with the belief that she was affectionate and loving, and only "did herself injustice" occasionally by talking at random and saying things which she did not really mean.

Mrs. Pleydell hardly realised how Eve had been petted in her uncle's house, how her will had been law, and how she had lived at constant high pressure of excitement and admiration. Even when there was no one else there was always the devoted Tom to keep her in good-humour with his adoration, which, though she really did not care for him in the least, Eve infinitely preferred to none. Not comprehending that in her sister-in-law's house there had rarely, if ever, been any time unoccupied by excitement of one sort or another, Mrs. Pleydell imagined that Tom must have had ample opportunity of studying Eve's disposition in the quietude of the domestic circle, and making, as she believed, all allowances for the different view of things taken by a young man in love and by an anxious mother, yet failed to understand how he and she could judge Eve so differently.

Sometimes she felt almost inclined to believe that Tom, who had had so much greater opportunities of knowing the girl, must be a better judge of Eve than she could be. Fre-

quently, when Eve responded to a reproof or some unpalatable advice with a coaxing caress, she would repress the instinct which told her that the girl was merely trying to evade what was unpleasant, and to withdraw attention from her misdemeanours, and, thinking of Tom's earnest assurance that her disposition was most affectionate, try to persuade herself that it showed infinite sweetness of temper to accept rebuke so gently. She strove hard to believe this, to see Eve in her best light and not to dwell too much on the shortcomings which were doubtless only the fault of the education to which she had herself abandoned her; but, struggle as she would, there were many times when Eve's hard worldly sayings and mercenary way of looking at things and her scantily-veiled egotism and selfishness caused her heart to fail, and made her think that Tom must be blinded and mistaken.

She would have dearly liked to ask Iris and Aunt Rachel exactly what they thought; she had often been on the point of doing so, but had always refrained, why she hardly knew;

but in reality because she dreaded to have her own fears confirmed. Iris always said everything that was kind about Eve, and even made more allowances for her than Mrs. Pleydell herself was always inclined to do; but her mother knew that, if she asked a point-blank question, Iris would give her a perfectly distinct answer as to what her private opinion was, and she dreaded to hear that it coincided with her own.

Aunt Rachel had never made any remark expressing an opinion about Eve since her return home, and from this, and the way in which she occasionally watched her when she was amusing herself at parties, Mrs. Pleydell felt uneasily conscious that her aunt's judgment was not favourable. Altogether, when Eve returned just before dinner, radiant from her boating excursion, her mother was in far from good spirits respecting her.

"It was delicious, 'mummy! Such a lovely afternoon!" she exclaimed, putting her arm round her mother, and rubbing her cheek softly against hers; "I feel I've got on immensely in

my rowing. I shall be able to take the shine out of Hildegarde."

"Eve, how often must I tell you that I will not allow you to talk slang?"

"Indeed, mummy, I do try, only it comes so natural when one feels jolly."

"Eve, you are really incorrigible."

"Everyone does it. Hildegarde is ever so much worse than I am."

"That is no reason for your doing what I disapprove."

"We have got a piece of news for you, Eve," said Iris, seeing that her sister's brow was beginning to lower; it did not take a great deal to disturb Eve's equanimity: "Lady Beechmont has been here, and has asked us to dinner to-morrow."

"Hurrah!" cried Eve, her face brightening; "that is better than anything that has happened since I left London."

"But I thought you insisted on refusing all dinner invitations?" said her mother, inquiringly. "I'm sure I understood you to say so; didn't you, Iris?"

“You don’t mean you’ve refused for me!” cried Eve, looking very blank. “Why, at Beechmont there’ll be people one can *talk* to, not only old fogies who bore one to death! Oh! mummy, I *must* go! Iris has had all the dinners lately, she must stay at home and let me go; Hildegarde and I are such friends.”

“Lady Imogene is a much older friend of Iris.”

“She’s dull and prosy. I daresay she’d like to dine in the Close, and talk about chants to the dean. Oh, mummy, say I may go.”

“Mamma is only laughing at you, Eve,” said Iris, smiling at her sister’s vehemence; “she accepted for us all.”

Eve at once plunged into an elaborate analysis of the members of the party in so far as she had learnt their names from Lady Hildegarde. She seemed to her mother to be on terms of rather startling intimacy with all the young men she mentioned, and she spoke of them quite as a matter of course by their Christian or their nicknames. It was the first time she had said much about any of her London friends by

name, and Mrs. Pleydell, much as she disapproved the style of her remarks, listened attentively and in silence, anxious to learn what she could of the friends with whom her daughter seemed destined to be once more brought in contact.

CHAPTER IX.

But flattery never seems absurd ;
 The flatter'd always takes your word.
 Impossibilities seem just,
 They take the strongest praise on trust ;
 Hyperboles, tho' ne'er so great,
 Will still come short of self-conceit.

Fable 18. GAY.

WHILE Mrs. Pleydell and Iris had been occupied with Lady Beechmont, Eve had been enjoying herself very considerably on the river. It was seldom that she failed to meet the handsome stranger who had rescued her from her dilemma on the eyot, and their acquaintance had progressed with remarkable celerity. No one who knew Eve could ever

accuse her of being shy, and she enjoyed the mystery of these unacknowledged meetings almost as much as the very decided compliments with which her acquaintance plied her.

It had grown to be almost an understood thing that when Eve passed the second glade in the Beechmont woods, the last point at which it was possible that anyone on the river might be seen from the drive up to the house, she should find the stranger in his boat awaiting her. That afternoon she had been later than usual, owing to the hour's detention for the practising omitted in the morning, and presumably her friend had become impatient, for she encountered him at the first bend of the river, not more than two hundred yards from the Gate House.

"I thought you were never going to make your appearance," he observed, turning his canoe and paddling by her side.

"Why in the world did you come so far down?" exclaimed Eve, looking round anxiously to see if anyone was in sight.

He laughed at her evident uneasiness.

“You needn’t be afraid; when did you ever see anyone on the banks of the Banner? It might be in the back-woods for any human being that is ever visible.”

“But there’s no knowing now,” said Eve, somewhat relieved now that they had reached the shelter of the woods; “it was all very well while Beechmont was empty, but now they’ve come down there’s no knowing who may not be about.”

“Then do you mean that our pleasant meetings—pleasant to me, at any rate—must now cease?”

As he spoke he looked at her in a way that made Eve’s heart flutter a little. It implied unmistakable admiration, sorrow at the mere thought of parting, and, she believed, love. She gave a little laugh to conceal her momentary emotion, which, however, her experienced companion did not fail to perceive.

“I don’t know about their ceasing, but we must take care; there would be such an awful

fuss if they knew at home that I met anyone. It's for fear I should that I'm never allowed to go down the river."

"So much the better for me."

"But now Hildegarde is come she'll be on the river too, she told me she'd got a stunning new canoe coming down, and Sir Henry Mossman, and Colonel Leybourne, and Captain Jorton, and Frank Ledmore are all going to bring theirs. You see it won't be quite the same thing."

"Very far from it. I'm awfully sorry."

"So am I," said Eve, not by any means certain that she really was so, but thinking it only civil to say she was. The excitement of having Beechmont filled with friends of her own and Hildegarde's, would almost compensate for the loss of her *tête-à-têtes*; and, besides, doubtless there would be "off days" when she could enjoy them too. Her companion watched her narrowly.

"It'll be all very well for you," he said at length. "You'll be enjoying yourself queening

it over all these fellows, but it'll be awfully hard on me."

"What a pity it is you don't know them, then you could join us; it would be so nice," said Eve.

"As you said yourself just now, it would not be at all the same thing. As to knowing them—well, I do know all you have named."

"You really do?" cried Eve. "Oh! then why don't you call at Beechmont, and it would be all right?"

"Because I don't choose to do so. To meet you alone in the *Waterlily* is delightful, to talk to you alone is happiness, but I don't care to meet you among a crowd of others, to see you smiling on other men. I may be very selfish, but I never care for anything that isn't for myself alone."

Eve felt a thrill of pride and delight; it was clear that her conquest was complete, if this was the way in which he regarded her. After a pause he said,

"I want you to come up to-day a little higher

than you have been before, just a bit above the eyot."

"Will there be time?"

"Plenty, if you do your best. Come, I will race you to the eyot. You can think you're rowing a match with Colonel Leybourne again, as you did at Windsor."

"What do you mean?" cried Eve, in amazement at reference being made to an escapade of which she thought no one knew but herself. The race in question had taken place by moonlight, when she and her aunt had been staying, the year before, with some friends for Ascot, and she had till now believed that she and the opponent who had dared her to the feat were the sole depositories of the secret.

"Did he tell you?" she asked, with an ominous frown.

Her companion laughed.

"Hardly; but you who are so alarmed about a possible spectator on this quiet stream might surely remember that the banks of the Thames are hardly so deserted as these."

“Do you mean to say you saw me?” said Eve. “Oh! I thought it was so safe—that nobody knew.”

“Of course you know it is quite safe with me, but if you want to keep secrets you should be more cautious. Now row your hardest, and see which will be at the eyot first.”

He allowed her to win by half a length to her infinite jubilation.

“Hurrah! I’ve beaten you!” she cried in delight. “I’m sure I shall be able to beat Hildegard and all of them! That is the only use of having had all these dull weeks.”

“Have they been so very dull?”

This was said with a meaning glance.

“Well, not just lately,” Eve said, with a confused air and a bright blush.

“I am glad I have been able slightly to ameliorate your sufferings.”

This was said with a sort of sneer.

“What is it you want me to see?” asked Eve, abruptly.

“You must come up a little farther. There!”

as, after the passage of about another hundred yards, they came to a thickly-wood part of the river. "I want you to land and honour my bower."

"But I can't—that is—I don't know. I mustn't be late or mummy'll be angry," stammered Eve.

It was one thing to row side by side with a stranger who lost no opportunity of displaying his admiration, but of whose very name she was still ignorant; but it was, she felt, quite another to accept a species of invitation from him on shore. It startled even her.

"It will not delay you many minutes, and you really have ample time. Come, surely you will not disappoint me. I have been looking forward to this so much."

She who hesitates is lost, and Eve was no exception to the rule.

It really seemed so difficult to say No, to frame any excuse for refusing, and almost before she knew what was happening the *Waterlily* was fastened to the bank,

and she was stepping out assisted by the stranger.

It was quite against Eve's habit to distress herself about anything ; now that she was once ashore she cast all her scruples to the winds and prepared to enjoy whatever was before her.

It was certainly a very pretty spot. A small lawn-like clearing in the wood sloped gently to the river, shaded by a splendid oak that stood in the centre. At the point of the lawn furthest from the bank was a small rustic summer-house, a perfect bower of clematis and yellow roses ; and evidently, Eve thought with a start of surprise, she must have been expected, for moss baskets filled with peaches and nectarines, and a large glass jug of milk, were arranged upon the table.

The view from the summer-house was very pretty ; on the side of the river where they were the water was deep and the stream rapid, but on the other there was a large expanse covered with waterlilies, and bordered with

bulrushes and yellow iris, beyond which, through an opening in the trees, was a glimpse of the Rockshire hills. All this beauty however was wasted upon Eve, who cared not in the least for scenery.

“I hope you like my bower?” said her companion, when he joined her after securing both boats. “You see I ventured to hope that my persuasions would not be unavailing, and so made some slight preparations.”

“Then you made sure that I should come.”

Eve hardly knew whether to be pleased or affronted. Of course, it was very flattering and showed how much he desired and appreciated her society, but she was not sure that she quite liked his assuming so positively that she would do whatever he asked her. He noticed the slight tone of offended dignity, and answered,

“I did not make sure,—it would be a bold man indeed who ever did that with a woman, but I *hoped*; I wished it so very much, and I

trusted that anyone so charming as yourself could not be so cruel as to refuse."

"But I very nearly did."

"And yet—you did not. Let me give you some fruit," and some beautiful nectarines were piled upon her plate.

"I can't tell you," he went on, as Eve, a little embarrassed at the situation, and for her wonderfully quiet, occupied herself with the nectarines. "I am sure you cannot guess what pleasure it gives me to see you here. And yet I think you can hardly fail to know how much I care for your society."

Eve blushed and looked extremely pretty, but the speech did not absolutely require an answer, and she was very glad to avoid giving one. For almost the first time in her life she was really shy, and there was also an unwonted fluttering of her heart that she could by no means account for.

"Will you not speak to me?" continued her companion, drawing nearer to her on the rustic bench they both occupied, "tell me at least

that you do not regret having landed at my bower."

"Oh, no, not at all, and these nectarines are delicious," answered Eve, with a somewhat forced laugh.

He came closer to her and took one of her hands in his.

"I want you to say something more than that,—can you not guess?"

"N—o," replied Eve, hesitatingly ; but colouring very much.

"I should have thought you could. Eve," pressing her hand warmly, "you *must* understand me, you must know how I care for you, how I have loved you ever since the day that I found you on the eyot."

Eve was really hardly prepared for such a declaration. She knew very well that her companion admired her, she thought it more than probable that he was falling in love with her, but she by no means expected him to come to the point so speedily. And she really hardly knew what her own feelings were ; she had

never thought about them, and only knew that her stolen interviews with the handsome stranger had very materially alleviated the dulness of Bannerton. Still she was aware that of late, and this particular day above all, she had felt as she had never done before, and suddenly the thought occurred to her, "Could she be falling in love?"

It was a new and startling notion. Eve regarded it as quite a matter of course that men should fall in love with her. She had even had not inconsiderable experience of being made love to. She had thought it extremely pleasant, and "awful fun," but hitherto it had never had the effect of quickening her pulses, or of affecting her feelings, save in the direction of gratified vanity. She had always laughed immoderately at girls who became "spoony," which, in the vocabulary of her set, meant those who married according to the dictates of their hearts, and cared for the man himself rather than for his means or position. Surely it could not be possible that

she, Eve Pleydell, who had scoffed so at others, could really have lost her heart, and that, too, to a stranger whose very name she did not know, and of whose fortune she was absolutely ignorant. No, such a thing could never be! She must be dreaming even to think of such folly!

All this passed through her mind in a moment. It was clear she had better accept the position as one of the ordinary love-making she was accustomed to—so she allowed her hand to remain in his, and answered, with a slight laugh,

“You forget that I don’t even know your name.”

“That is no answer, Eve,” and as he spoke his arm stole round her waist, and again she felt overwhelmed with astonishment at the throbbing of her heart. “If you cared for me as I hoped, as I care for you, dear, you would care for *me*, not for who I might be.”

“But—I don’t know—it is so strange,” stam-

mered Eve, thoroughly bewildered, and beginning to lose her usual calm self-possession, which had often stood her in good stead. "You—I—I don't understand."

"You understand, don't you, dear, that I love you? Surely you must do that, Eve. I have not concealed my feelings, or must I make it still more plain?" and, before she quite realized his intention, he drew her to him, and kissed her passionately.

"You pretty little dissembler," he said, holding her closely as she struggled in his embrace. "You dainty little bird, why do you beat your wings? Eve, you cannot deny the truth, you *know* you love me."

His cool determination staggered Eve. She wanted to be very indignant, to declare that he had insulted her, to vow she would never speak to him again, but in face of his determined assertions and cool appropriation, words, for perhaps the first time in her life, failed her. She felt that she would give worlds to be safe back in the *Waterlily*, and yet that

it would cost her a pang to move from where she was. Was he right? Did he know better than she? Was this love? All these thoughts surged through her brain, and completely deprived her of speech.

“Am I never to hear your voice again, pretty one?” he said, at length. “Come, Eve, say ‘I love you.’”

“I—like you,” said Eve, slowly, at length finding her tongue.

“Like! that is a cold word. Eve! Eve! you are a little coquette! You want to lead me on to tell you over and over again how I love you.”

“But—it is all so strange! I haven’t known you long! I don’t even know who you are!” protested poor, bewildered Eve.

He suddenly withdrew his arm, and gave a short, harsh laugh.

“Still harping on my name! Well, if that is such a great point in your eyes, you may call me Claud, Claud Esmond. Now I hope you are satisfied.”

Eve never could bear that any of her admirers should seem to be displeased with her. At the first sign of their being so, she always became conciliatory, not wishing to lose their adoration. So, with a most bewitching little pout, she exclaimed,

“Indeed, I don’t see why you should be angry with me !”

“Angry with you !” he exclaimed, sitting down by her again, and again encircling her waist with his arm. “Only tell me you love me, Eve, and I’ll never be angry with you as long as I live.”

Eve did not say anything, but she looked up in his face.

“You mean that I must take silence for consent, you little shy thing, do you?” he said, smiling. “Well, I will ;” and he proceeded to suit the action to the word.

“One thing I don’t quite see,” said Eve at length, when the fast-lengthening shadows began to give warning that it was quite time for her to be making her way home-

wards. "How am I to tell mamma? She would be so dreadfully angry at my having met you, and said nothing about it. Can't you get introduced to me properly, somehow? You say you know them at Beechmont. It could surely be managed, and then it would all seem to happen quite naturally."

He gave a peculiar, short laugh, which Eve did not at all understand.

"I am afraid it can hardly be managed in that way, little fairy. You must trust me, Eve—you know how I love you; but for the present I can say nothing except to your own self. You won't mind saying nothing about me just yet, will you, my pet? We shall meet just as usual, you know, and I have excellent reasons."

"Oh, I don't mind at all," said Eve; "but I can't think, if you know them at Beechmont, why you want to keep away. The house is to be full, and they are to have dances and charades and all sorts of fun."

"All which I don't care for. What I care for

is you, Eve, and I like to have you all to myself on the river or here in my bower. You will come here again?"

"Oh, yes. But, you know, as I tell you, there will be people about now, and we shall all be boating together."

"I shall take very good care to keep out of your way when you are not alone, you may be sure," he said hastily, and with some temper; "it would be no pleasure to me to see you surrounded by a pack of brainless idiots."

Perhaps this speech did as much as anything else to convince Eve that he really did care for her. She was used to hearing the men who were making love to her characterising any other member of their species to whom she might speak, as a fool.

"Now you are cross again," she said, pouting; "I am sure you must have a dreadful temper. Now I must go—I shall be dreadfully late."

"You *shall* tell me you love me before you go," he exclaimed, almost fiercely seizing her

in his arms; and Eve, who had no desire to incur displeasure about her boating at home, and so be perhaps interdicted from going on the river whenever she pleased, whispered, "I love you," very low, and submitted passively to his passionate caresses.

They started directly after almost in silence, both too occupied with their own thoughts to look back at the spot they had just left, or they might have seen the boughs behind the summer-house parted, and a handsome gipsy face looking scowlingly after them. There was but small attempt at conversation before they parted; Eve's mind was quite in a whirl. She hardly attempted to realise what were her feelings, but she felt decidedly relieved that Claud—she called him Claud to herself, though the name had not as yet passed her lips—did not require her to tell her mother at once. Mummy would, she was sure, be so very angry; she made such a fuss about things that no one else would mind.

And then if it were to be all settled at once,

and she were known to be engaged—for she never doubted that she was so—there would not be half the fun that she expected at Beechmont. She was sure Claud would be jealous, and would not like her to flirt and amuse herself. But now, as it was, she could enjoy herself with all her old friends at Beechmont, and in the intervals would still have the excitement of meeting her lover upon the river. Yes, everything was arranging itself in the most satisfactory manner, and Eve chattered more and was gayer that evening than she had ever been since her return to the Gate House.

Lady Hildegarde made her appearance again soon after breakfast the next morning, and her manners were not more prepossessing to Mrs. Pleydell than had been the case the day before. There was a good deal of slang she could hear, and a great deal of whispering and giggling on the sofa, through which she caught several of the nicknames of the young men of whom Eve had talked the night before. When at last

Lady Hildegarde rose to go she addressed her.

"My dear, it is very kind of you to come and see Eve, but I must ask you not to do so again in the morning ; I like her to read steadily and practise a little, and of course she cannot do so if you are here."

"But she came out last year," said Lady Hildegarde, staring in astonishment.

"That is no reason she should not read something sensible," said Mrs. Pleydell, smiling. "Surely you do not idle away your whole time?"

"Oh, no ; no one ever calls me idle," said Lady Hildegarde. "I practise lawn-tennis a lot, and I row and I ride. I'm going to school my chestnut mare over the hurdles in the park after lunch ; I never was idle in my life."

"Do you never read?"

"Oh, yes, if I can get hold of a really good novel ; but most of them are so slow and goody they send me to sleep."

"Lady Imogene used to be fond of reading."

"Oh, Image! Yes, but then she's old, you know, and fussy. She talks about improving one's mind. I always tell her I'm quite contented with mine as it is."

"Do you really mean you have no desire for information?"

"Not a bit. Where's the use of knowing a lot of things? Men only call you blue and avoid you. I've always got any number of partners, and Image sits still half the night."

"Evidently we shan't agree," said Mrs. Pleydell, quietly. "Still, as my views are very different, I must ask you not to disturb Eve in the morning. I hope you'll remember."

"Oh! yes, I won't forget. Ta-ta, you poor victim!" with a careless kiss, to Eve. "We'll enjoy ourselves to-night, at any rate."

"Mummy," said Eve, with a tragic countenance and an accent of despair, "are you going to keep me in prison all my life?"

Vexed as she was, Mrs. Pleydell could not help laughing.

"My dear Eve, don't be so ridiculous. Keep

you in prison indeed ! Just think of the hours you are out in your boat ! But I must insist on trying to put some kind of useful knowledge into your empty little head, and I will not allow your morning hours to be given up to gossip and frivolity. I begin to wish the Beechmonts had gone to Firshire as usual. I hardly think Lady Hildegarde a very desirable companion for you ; she is terribly bad style."

"Mummy ! they are in the very best set in London !"

"That depends on what is called the best, my dear. In the 'best' set in my time young ladies had some idea of good manners, Lady Hildegarde has none whatever. But we have wasted quite time enough. Get Macaulay and begin your reading."

"I'm sure," said Eve, pausing as she seated herself, and looking at her mother with piteous eyes—"I'm sure I might as well be talking and amusing myself with Hildegarde as reading this stupid book. I never know a single word I have been reading."

“That is not the fault of the book.”

“Well, I suppose I must do it,” and Eve began reading, in a way that aggravated her mother almost beyond endurance, showing plainly as it did that she was not even attempting to think of what she was about. Indeed Eve’s thoughts were fully occupied with wondering whether Colonel Leybourne, who Hildergarde had told her was to take her in to dinner that night, would be as devoted as when they last met, and also on what afternoon she should be able to meet Claud again in safety.

CHAPTER X.

Do anything but love! or, if thou lovest,
And art a woman, hide thy heart from him
Whom thou dost worship: never let him know
How dear he is; flit like a bird before him;
Lead him from tree to tree, from flower to flower;
But be not won; or thou wilt, like that bird,
When caught and caged, be left to pine neglected,
And perish in forgetfulness.

L. E. LANDON.

THE dinner-party at Beechmont was very pleasant to Iris and Eve, though Mrs. Pleydell can be hardly said to have derived from it any very lively satisfaction. She and Lady Beechmont had never very much in common, though they were very good friends; and the few elderly ladies among the guests seemed to

care only to talk of their own acquaintances and amusements, and to think that any topic started by a lady who lived all the year round in the country must be necessarily dull. The men, with hardly an exception, were all quite young, and Mrs. Pleydell's escort, after a few preliminary observations on the weather, devoted himself entirely to a pretty girl on the other side of him, and never again addressed the lady whom he had taken in.

Mrs. Pleydell was glad to find herself on Lord Beechmont's left hand; he was a gentleman who had not so completely adopted modern notions as his wife and youngest daughter had done, and exerted himself to be courteous to everyone who came within his reach. He was not specially clever or amusing, but his companion was by no means exacting, and quite contented with his conversation. She looked down the long table to see what had become of her daughters.

Iris was engaged in an animated and, her mother felt sure, a very interesting conversation

with Lord Rootley, who had taken her in to dinner. That the subject was an intellectual one Mrs. Pleydell felt tolerably sure; it was not Iris's way to grow so animated or look so eager over the ordinary topics of dinner-table conversation. Eve, who sat further off, was leaning back in her chair, looking up in a manner of which her mother greatly disapproved into the eyes of her neighbour, a *blasé* but good-looking guardsman, whose manner was rather *empresé*, and yet gave Mrs. Pleydell the idea of not being particularly respectful.

When the move to the drawing-room was made, it appeared that the young people meant to keep entirely to themselves. Only Iris and Lady Imogene remained in the saloon; Lady Hildegarde and the other girls, with one or two of the younger matrons, went to the billiard-room, which was separated from the saloon by a small ante-room, and screams of laughter were soon heard issuing from it.

"They seem very merry," Mrs. Pleydell

said to her hostess. "Shall you not join them?"

But Lady Beechmont opened her eyes in surprise, and said, languidly,

"Join them! Oh! no; that is the young people's room, they do not want us. Now I want you to tell me something. If I am able to go to Miss Netherleigh's to-morrow—you know my health is so wretchedly uncertain I can never feel sure of being able to do anything—would she let me bring some of my friends, do you think? It is always so difficult to know how to amuse people in the country."

"Hardly here with your beautiful place and lovely gardens, surely," said Mrs. Pleydell; "but I am sure my aunt would be most happy to see any friends you might like to take with you."

"Thank you, that will be very nice. I suppose young people don't go much, do they?"

"Yes, indeed, all the young people in the neighbourhood."

“You don’t say so! Hildegarde understood from Eve that it was dull, and that there was no good tennis.”

“There is some tennis; but Eve does not seem to think any of the young people here very good players.”

“Well, she can keep up her playing here. Hildegarde means to have a meeting once a week, and a tournament; Eve must come and practise every morning.”

“Not in the morning, dear Lady Beechmont; I told Lady Hildegarde to-day I hoped she would not come to see us again in the morning. I have no objection to Eve’s having all the amusement she can in the afternoon, but she must have some time for solid reading in the morning.”

“Solid reading?” Lady Beechmont repeated, in amazement.

Mrs. Pleydell was about to explain when the gentlemen appeared, and Lord Beechmont came and sat down by her, the conversation drifting into other channels. All the young men at

once disappeared into the billiard-room with the exception of Lord Rootley, who, after talking for a little to one or two of the elder ladies, seated himself by Iris, who was looking over Lady Imogene's portfolio.

"Do you prefer drawings to billiards, Miss Netherleigh?" he asked.

"I prefer drawings which are worth looking at to most things," said Iris. "Besides, I cannot play billiards."

"Would you like to go and look on?" asked Lady Imogene. "Perhaps it would be more amusing to you, and you can see these sketches at any time."

"Unless you wish it I would rather stay here," said Iris, as a perfect shout of laughter was heard in the other room.

"You may be sure Imogene much prefers being here," said Lord Rootley; "she always likes the quietest place she can find." And then he began talking of the scenery of Coalshire, where he had not been for seven or eight years, and comparing it with Firshire, where

the family usually spent the autumn, and of which there were many sketches in Lady Imogene's portfolio.

"You will quite have to make acquaintance again with Beechmont," said Iris. "Some of the glades in the beech woods near the river are most beautiful, and when you go a little farther the drives in the forest are really lovely."

"I am glad we have come here this year; it seems a pity not to know such a pretty country; but my father dislikes the idea of the neighbourhood of Bannerton."

"Of course the country would be much prettier without it," said Iris; "but, so long as Lord Beechmont will not let them do anything on this side of the town, it cannot do us much harm, except indeed when there is a south-east wind to bring us the smoke."

"Well, it is very certain my father will never do anything to spread the town or works on this side. Well," as an unusually loud burst of merriment was heard in the billiard-room, "they

seem to be amusing themselves! I think I shall go and see what it is all about."

"I heard Eve's voice," said Iris.

"Your sister generally is foremost whenever there is any fun going on. She has wonderful spirits."

"Sometimes. I am afraid she finds it very very dull here; at least, so she says, though we have had an exceptionally gay summer. Her delight was great when she heard Beechmont was to be inhabited this autumn."

"She and Hildegarde struck up a great friendship," said Lady Imogene.

Lord Rootley looked as if he were about to speak, but he evidently thought better of it and walked off to the billiard-room.

It was with infinite reluctance, and with many exclamations as to its being inhumanly early, that Eve prepared for departure when summoned by her mother.

"Then you'll be up here by eleven," Iris heard Lady Hildegarde say; and Eve answered,

“Yes, if I can.”

“I am afraid you can’t, Eve,” said Iris, gently; and then, turning to Lady Hildegarde, she continued: “Mamma will not allow Eve to be disturbed in the morning.”

“It’s no business of yours—you needn’t meddle!” exclaimed Eve, angrily.

“I thought you had forgotten, or you would not have engaged yourself when you know mamma will not hear of it,” said Iris, quietly.

“I’d see all the books in Christendom in the river before I’d be tied down for the whole morning,” said Lady Hildegarde; “if you’ve an ounce of spirit, Eve, you’ll show you won’t be put upon.”

But Eve had by this time arrived at a tolerably clear understanding that her mother meant what she said, and that, if she attempted any such insubordination as her friend would have advised, she might perhaps be punished by not being allowed to go to Beechmont at all. Of course it was dreadfully hard; how was she ever to attain sufficient proficiency to shine in

the tournament, if she might not practise tennis all the morning instead of reading rubbishing books? Still it would be infinitely worse if mummy got angry—she was such a cross old thing!—and kept her away from her friends in the afternoon also. What a lucky girl Hildergarde was to have a mother who never interfered with anything she wished to do!

So she dared not, as she dearly longed to do, set her mother at defiance, though she coaxed, implored, wept, promised untold industry when Beechmont was again empty, and exhausted all her ingenuity in the endeavour to persuade her mother to let her do as she wished. But Mrs. Pleydell was firm. It was not the value to Eve's mind of what she read—indeed she shrewdly suspected that its meaning never reached her brain,—but it was a certain element of restraint, a form of discipline, and as such she had no intention of dispensing with it.

So to all Eve's coaxing and blandishments she turned a deaf ear, and would have been

considerably shocked and astonished if she could have known how cordially the girl hated her in consequence.

Eve had little affection and less reverence. She liked to do whatever seemed good in her own eyes, and detested every obstacle that stood in her way. She was more aggrieved than ever when she found that her mother meant also to insist on her going to Aunt Rachel's in the afternoon.

"I thought if I was miserable and wretched in the morning you would let me enjoy myself in the afternoon," she said, in tragic tones, and Mrs. Pleydell laughed and told her that Aunt Rachel's Thursdays were always so pleasant that she need not affect to consider herself a martyr.

"They were all very well when there was nothing else," said Eve, dismally; "but now—"

"Now, Eve," said her mother, gravely, "you had better understand at once that I cannot allow the mere fact that the Beechmonts are at home, and have friends staying with them, to

upset our whole lives. I shall expect you to do everything just as usual, though, if any pleasure or amusement that I consider unobjectionable comes in your way, you shall enjoy it. But I cannot allow you to live at Beechmont, as you seem to want to do, or to give up everything else to run after Lady Hildegarde; you will see quite enough of her. Do you understand?"

"Yes," said Eve, with a deep sigh; and it was with the air of a victim that she came down bewitchingly dressed to go to Miss Netherleigh's party. But the first thing that caught her eye as they passed on to the lawn through the drawing-room window was the whole of the party from Beechmont, and in a very short time she was engaged in a game of tennis with Hildegarde, Colonel Leybourne, and Mr. Ledmore. She had no eyes, apparently, for any of her old friends, and one or two of the officers who were her great adorers were much disturbed, and betook themselves to Iris for consolation.

"But you must remember these are old friends of my sister's," said Iris, in response to one of these Jeremiads; "there was quite a chorus of greetings when we dined at Beechmont last night."

"Last night! Then I am afraid we shall not meet there to-night."

But it seemed that such was to be the case. Lady Beechmont was renewing her acquaintance with all her neighbours, and begging them to "just look in to-night at half-past nine for a little dancing," and of course Mrs. Pleydell was not omitted.

"Isn't it delicious, Iris?" said Eve, joining her sister for a moment between the games, to make quite sure that her mother had consented; "but oh! you *must* make mummy let me go up every morning and practise! I didn't know how rusty I'd grown till I got among real good players again. What chance should I have in the tournament? And they're going to give such lovely prizes—a gold bracelet and an enamel chatelaine!"

“I’m afraid you don’t seem to think much of our powers as tennis-players, Miss Pleydell,” said Captain Deverell, in a rather offended tone. He was exceedingly proud of his playing, and during the afternoon at Allanton, when he and Eve had eaten so many of Mrs. Vaughan’s nectarines in company, and got through a not inconsiderable amount of flirtation, she had made many gracious speeches to him on the subject. She had not observed that he was within hearing when she spoke, but promptly answered :

“I don’t think there are any of the *ladies* here who can play at all, Captain Deverell. There are one or two good players among the gentlemen—you, and Mr. Furnivall, and—really I don’t know who else. But if there is always one bad player in a set, it spoils the play.”

“Yes, and certainly none of our ladies play anything like so well as you do, Miss Pleydell,” returned Captain Deverell, quite mollified by her diplomatic answer. “Is there any hope of

a game with you to-day? Lady Hildegarde seems a wonderful player."

"Oh, yes, I'm sure we can have you," and very soon Captain Deverell and Lady Hildegarde were playing against Eve and Colonel Leybourne.

Iris would not for worlds have allowed to herself that she found the afternoon dull; still less would she have admitted the reason, which was that Laurence Furnivall was not present. But she heard Lady Beechmont ask Mrs. Furnivall to the dance that evening, and when that lady replied that she would come with pleasure, if her son returned home in time to accompany her, she became conscious of a greater interest in the entertainment than she had before felt.

Mrs. Furnivall had hardly seen Iris since the day at Allanton, when her suspicions that there was "something" between her and her precious Laurence had first dawned upon her mind, and had caused her to make those remarks to her son respecting the effect of Mr. William Pley-

dell's defalcations on the consideration rendered to his relatives, which had so greatly relieved her anxiety. Still she felt a lingering uneasiness, and watched the girl with all the jealousy of an instinctive antagonism.

She would have been sorely puzzled to give a reason for her belief that Iris would "never suit Laurence;" in fact she had none, excepting her unconscious distaste to the idea of his marrying anyone. It argued, however, she thought, that she must have been mistaken in what she had fancied she saw at Allanton, that her son should have gone away the next day and not have come back for ten days. If he had cared much it was not likely that he should have absented himself so long.

The next day was their garden-party and dance, and the next was the 1st of September, after which there was but little likelihood that anything but the partridges would occupy his attention for some time.

But still she watched Iris very narrowly. She would dearly have liked to be able to say

quietly to Laurence, as they drove that evening to Beechmont, that she supposed there was "something" between Iris Netherleigh and—anyone, that "no doubt they should soon hear an announcement," and much more to the same effect.

But, watch as she might, Iris gave her no opportunity of even persuading herself that she was interested in anyone. She moved about among the guests with her own special grace, acting like a daughter of the house in such particulars as bringing people together, seeing that none of the girls felt neglected, and that everyone was duly provided with tea, but there was no special conversation with anyone that she could possibly take hold of.

All the young men were willing enough to talk to Iris, and she evidently enjoyed their society, it was the manner that made it impossible to connect even her most animated conversation with the mere notion of flirtation. As we have said before, Iris was by nature extremely dignified, and could laugh, talk, and

thoroughly enjoy herself, without ever for a moment becoming in the slightest degree familiar. Favourite as she was, it must indeed have been a bold man who ventured on the slightest liberty with Iris Netherleigh.

How could she possibly be the mother of two such curiously different daughters? was a problem that had occurred to Mrs. Pleydell often since Eve's return home, but perhaps never oftener than on this afternoon, as, seated under the cedar-tree, she quietly watched them both. She could not say that Eve really did anything wrong, but she disliked her manner extremely, and felt that, as manner generally is the indication of what lies below the surface, it implied a want of refinement, a coarseness of fibre in Eve that she was very sorry to recognize.

Still she did not quite know what to do; to talk to Eve about manner was of little avail. She quite knew that the girl would put on a supremely innocent air, profess her readiness to do anything "darling mummy" wished, if she only knew what it was, and then—go on pre-

cisely as before. It was not like anything tangible that she could specify and forbid. Eve would wilfully misunderstand, and no good would be done by speaking. Still it annoyed her terribly, and she wished most cordially that the Beechmonts and their friends had stayed away.

From what she saw of the set collected under Lady Hildegarde's auspices it was not a good school for Eve; and yet without absolute rudeness, and making the girl think herself cruelly ill-used, she could not hold entirely aloof. If Lady Imogene and Lord Rootley were the only young members of the family! They both seemed sensible, well-mannered young people; but there was unfortunately the younger sister, who was manifestly the ruling power in the establishment. She almost began to revolve plans in her head of going abroad for the winter as a means of keeping Eve out of the unfortunate intimacy.

They arrived at Beechmont somewhat late that evening. Mrs. Pleydell was struck with

the peculiarity of Eve's coming down with her cloak on, for she generally liked to contemplate herself in the pier-glasses, and, perceiving that the dress was one she had not worn before, insisted on inspecting it; and, finding that it was quite as objectionably *décolleté* as those she had reformed, desired her to change it.

"But it makes me so dowdy," remonstrated Eve. "I'm sure last night I looked as old as Iris, and quite different from anyone else."

"I will wait ten minutes, Eve," answered her mother, quietly; "if you are not properly dressed then, Iris and I shall go alone."

And so certain was Eve that her mother would do what she threatened, that she obeyed sulkily, lamenting her own folly in having come down before the carriage was ready.

Almost the first people they saw were Mrs.

Furnivall and Laurence, and his mother watched with disapproval the *empressement* with which he made his way to Iris's side. Eagerly as she watched, however, she could not perceive that the girl's manner was in the slightest degree warmer to him than it was to anyone else.

As a matter of fact, it really was colder, for ever since Iris had learnt to understand her own feelings she had been in such terror of in any way betraying them that she had involuntarily been colder to Laurence than to anyone else. Still her manner did not reassure Mrs. Furnivall: it was not for a moment to be supposed that any woman could be found who would dream of refusing Laurence if he asked her, much less a girl like Iris Netherleigh, who lived a quiet life in the country, knew intimately the beauties and glories of Rookwood, and must be fully aware of the magnificent position—Mrs. Furnivall honestly believed it to be little inferior to

royalty itself—occupied by its mistress. No, there naturally was no hope in that quarter. If Laurence once made up his mind to ask her, there could not be a doubt of the answer he would receive.

In one of the pauses of the dance they stopped just in front of her, and, straining her ears to hear what they were saying, she found Laurence in the midst of an animated description of the cricket match in which he had played on the winning side. All the details were far from amusing to Iris, who barely understood the game, but Laurence was possessed of the not uncommon masculine belief that whatever was interesting to him must of necessity be so to everyone else, and he pursued his tale remorselessly.

Mrs. Furnivall felt rather comforted. No sentiment surely could possibly underlie a detailed account of a cricket match. Perhaps, after all, she was alarming herself unnecessarily, still—she should feel happier and more at ease

when the next day was safely over. On their way home she could not refrain from a tentative observation.

"Iris Netherleigh looked well to-night."

"Well! she was far and away the handsomest girl there!"

This was not encouraging.

"She always seems rather inanimate."

"Well, she isn't always all over the place, like her sister, and she doesn't talk loud slang, like that Lady Hildegrade,"—Hildegarde had grievously offended Laurence's dignity by calmly throwing him over for some one else; he was not used to such treatment, and resented it—"but for quiet, sensible talk, ay, and plenty of fun, too, I don't think I know her equal."

Worse and worse. Mrs. Furnivall gave an uneasy laugh.

"Really, Laurence, you are quite enthusiastic."

"She is worth it," he said, very quietly.

He had it on his lips to tell his mother his intentions for the morrow, but something, what he hardly knew, made him refrain. It certainly was no diffidence as to the answer he should receive. It hardly occurred to Laurence Furnivall, any more than to his mother, that it was possible he could be refused. If he had not felt this perfect security, he would hardly have postponed his question so long, or have gone away for ten days just as he had made up his mind to ask it. He could not himself have explained why he paused, but he did do so, and in a few moments they were at home, and the opportunity had passed.

Mrs. Furnivall went slowly upstairs, to lie awake great part of the night wondering what Laurence's feelings really were, and devising plans by which she could keep him apart from Iris during the afternoon; and Laurence, accompanied by various dogs, who had welcomed him rapturously in the hall, went to the smok-

ing-room, where he sat meditating on Iris's perfections, and how well she would fill the position of mistress of Rookwood.

CHAPTER XI.

Who hath not felt that breath in the air,
 A perfume and freshness strange and rare,
 A warmth in the light, and a bliss everywhere,
 When young hearts yearn together ?
 All sweets below, and all sunny above,
 Oh ! there's nothing in life like making love,
 Save making hay in fine weather.

Miss Kilmansegg. Hood.

“**H**OW I hope it will be fine !” was the wish with which all the young people invited to Rookwood went to bed on the night before Mrs. Furnivall’s garden-party.

The entertainments at Rookwood were always greatly enjoyed and looked forward to. Mrs. Furnivall was a model hostess, under-

standing exactly when people liked to be left to enjoy themselves in their own way, and when a little assistance was invaluable. Perhaps weather signified less at Rookwood than anywhere else, for the house was very large, and the picture-gallery and various other rooms afforded ample space for everyone, besides providing them with ample entertainment in the examination of the pictures and other art-treasures. Still the grounds and gardens were so extensive and so very beautiful that it was always considered a treat to explore them at leisure, and a real misfortune when weather caused the gathering to be confined to the house.

When Iris, who was as anxious as anyone about the weather, first looked out in the morning, she knew that a lovely, but probably very hot day was in prospect, from the silvery, tremulous haze that hung over the landscape. There had been something in Laurence's greeting to her the night before that had made her heart beat, and caused her to look forward

with unusual eagerness to the coming day's festivity.

She had, ever since Eve opened her eyes, done her best to think as little as was possible of Laurence, had striven to occupy her mind with other topics whenever her thoughts, as they very frequently did, strayed in his direction; but she had been quite unable to disguise the fact from herself that she cared for him, and that she hoped he cared for her. But the night before was the first time that they had met since his mother's observations on their return from Allanton had decided Laurence to speak directly, and she had at once realised a difference that caused her heart to throb as she reflected that she was about to pass many hours absolutely under his roof.

But—and as she thought it she coloured to the roots of her hair and hid her face in her hands—she must be more than ever careful that by no sign should anyone, least of all Laurence himself, discover that he was in the slightest degree more interesting to her than any of the

guests. She almost doubted whether she would wear the dress she had intended, a delicate mauve muslin with a profusion of lace, for she remembered to have heard Laurence say it was his favourite colour, and might he not think that that was the reason she had selected it? Still as both her mother and Eve would wonder if she changed her mind after ordering the dress on purpose, and she could think of no available excuse, she decided that it would perhaps be better to wear it. If Eve's curiosity were roused, she might ask tiresome questions, and make observations respecting Laurence which would be very annoying.

Iris and her mother were on terms of more affectionate confidence than is very usual between mothers and daughters; but Mrs. Pleydell had never approached the subject of Laurence, and naturally there was nothing that Iris could say about it. She therefore had a positive dread of any of Eve's foolish speeches in her mother's hearing; the latter would not unnaturally imagine that she had taken her

flighty little sister into a confidence which she had withheld from herself.

All the agitated thoughts of the morning brought an unwonted flush to her cheek, and, when they drove up to the door at Rookwood, Mrs. Pleydell remarked to herself that she had hardly ever seen her look so beautiful.

It must not be supposed that Mrs. Pleydell was entirely blind to what was going on between Laurence Furnivall and Iris. She had long since noted that he was decidedly attracted, and was observant enough quite to realise that Iris's proud and somewhat cold manner had a fascination for anyone who had been satiated as he had with smiles and flattery.

Of Iris's feelings she was by no means sure, but she had implicit trust in the girl's sense and dignity, and would not for worlds have intruded upon her confidence. She knew perfectly well that, when Iris had anything to tell which she thought her mother ought to know, she would make no delay. Meanwhile she did not wish to suggest the idea of Laurence's attach-

ment, lest, as was very possible, it might prove evanescent, in which case it would mortify Iris's proud spirit to think that even her mother had observed it.

Mrs. Pleydell had none of the anxiety impartially attributed to all mothers to see her daughters married. Believing as she firmly did that married life was the happiest state for a woman, she yet had seen quite enough of the world to be aware that ill-assorted unions are more frequent than thoroughly harmonious ones, and she regarded unhappy marriage as an infinitely more deplorable state than the despised one of spinsterhood.

Both her girls were provided for; Iris sufficiently, Eve substantially; there was not, therefore, that reason for her to be anxious regarding their future prospects; and though she had herself married at seventeen, and been happy as a dream during her first term of married life, she could not help feeling that a girl who had seen a little of the world was more likely to discriminate wisely and choose for her own

happiness than if she fell in love in all the bustle and excitement of her first season. As to urging any man upon her daughter's consideration, Mrs. Pleydell would have considered it a positive crime, though she would have pointed out calmly and clearly any objections she saw to an actual suitor.

Of course if Laurence proposed and Iris accepted him, it would be an unexceptionable match from a worldly point of view, and there was no objection to be made to the young man himself, who had always borne the highest character. Still she hardly thought him worthy of Iris: she was so cultivated and intellectual, so far superior indeed to most girls, that it seemed to her mother that it would be rather a sacrifice for her to marry a man without an aim or even an idea beyond athletic and field sports.

Still this was a point entirely for her decision; she must know certainly as much, probably far more of Laurence's mental qualifications and powers of conversation than her mother

did, and if she were satisfied that was all that could be wished. Mrs. Pleydell had been turning these things over in her mind for the hundredth time during their drive, and, as she noted Iris's unwonted flush as they drove up the avenue, it struck her that perhaps the girl expected something definite to take place that day.

After her disturbed slumbers, Mrs. Furnivall had had little time to make arrangements how to keep her son and Iris apart. The guests who were to stay in the house arrived at intervals during the morning: they were for the most part shooting friends of Laurence's, and had therefore not been asked the day before in case he might not be at home to receive them. Some had brought wives, some sisters, and Mrs. Furnivall was fully employed in making acquaintance with some, welcoming those already known to her, showing her guests their rooms, and other duties of a hostess.

Laurence, who did not particularly care for

the business of reception, and thought he should have plenty of it during the afternoon, disappeared "on business" directly after breakfast, which meant that he talked for about five minutes with the agent, and then amused himself for the rest of the morning in the kennel, talking over the dogs and shooting prospects for the morrow with the keeper, and greeted his guests *en bloc* at luncheon-time.

It was a most lovely day, "made on purpose for a garden-party," as everyone said very many times during the afternoon. Mrs. Furnivall received her guests on the upper terrace, on which the windows of the saloon opened, and from which the view was certainly most beautiful; the vases on the terrace were filled with masses of blooming geraniums, the balustrades were wreathed with clematis of every hue, from the dark Jackmanii to the newest and palest shade of lavender; the peacocks sunned themselves among the creepers, or paced majestically along the turf; below the terraces lay the formal garden, with every bed

a mass of bloom, and beyond this stretched the park, with its splendid oaks, beneath which the deer were couched among the brake, and glimpses could be caught of the Banner, the whole backed by the exquisite outline of the Rockshire hills. What was always said on such occasions was certainly true—Rookwood was an ideal place for a garden-party.

Laurence stood on the terrace a little way from his mother, and welcomed the guests when they had paid their *devoirs* to her. She was unspeakably annoyed at being unable to observe his greeting of Iris; but at the moment Lady Beechmont arrived, and before the necessary introduction of her large party was satisfactorily accomplished, Mrs. Pleydell and her daughters passed on.

If Iris's cheeks had worn an unusual bloom on her arrival, they flushed scarlet at the fervent pressure of Laurence's hand. The thought of what he intended to do in a very short space of time had excited him so much that he could not repress this evidence of his feelings, and

hardly guessed himself the vehemence of his pressure.

It must have been more than an hour after this when, the arrivals having at length ceased, Laurence was free to desert his post, and he went in search of Iris. Mrs. Pleydell, Miss Netherleigh, and two or three other ladies, were sitting on the lower terrace, Eve was engrossed in a game of tennis, and at a little distance Iris and Lord Rootley were seated, talking apparently with considerable interest. It was a sight that did not please Laurence, why, he hardly knew, for certainly the idea of being jealous of Lord Rootley had not occurred to him, but it rather jarred him to find Iris apparently so pleasantly occupied; he had a sort of feeling that she should have had an intuition of his intentions, and have kept herself disengaged for the moment when he should be free to claim her.

He stood for a little watching the tennis, but resisted all entreaties to take part in a fresh game which was about to begin. Then saunter-

ing up to Iris with a very fair assumption of indifference, though, if he had but known it, the look in his eyes quite belied his manner, he said,

“Miss Netherleigh, I have been looking for you ever so long. I want to show you the great aloe in the pleasaunce; it has flowered this year.”

“Dear me! I should like to see it very much. I never saw an aloe in flower,” said Iris, rising.

Her heart beat. Was he making an opportunity to speak to her alone? If so, she was quite willing to hear what he wished to say, and, if not—well, there was nothing to excite the remark of the most captious in her walking with her host, whom she knew so well, to see so unusual a sight as an aloe in blossom.

“It only flowers once in a hundred years, you know, so it is one’s only chance of seeing it,” said Laurence, as she rose.

“I fancy that is now an exploded fallacy,” said Lord Rootley, who was walking with them

in the direction of the pleasaunce in blissful ignorance of how earnestly his companions wished him elsewhere; "it has been discovered that an aloe flowers very much more frequently. But you know the superstition, don't you, Furnivall? That the owner of an aloe will always have the wish of his heart granted the year that it flowers?"

"I never heard that before," said Iris, for Laurence did not reply. He was thinking that the wish of his heart at that moment was that Lord Rootley would leave them.

"I say, Rootley," he said, suddenly, "hasn't your mother got a reddish dress with white lace?"

"Something of the sort. Why?"

"I think she must want you; at least, she is beckoning with her parasol, and I do not think it can be to me."

"I'll go and see, at any rate," said Lord Rootley, and, as he left them, Laurence said, with infinite satisfaction,

"There! that's all right."

The pleasaunce was a pretty, wild shrubbery, gay in the spring with laburnum and lilac, hawthorn, and the beautiful rose-coloured *Wigelia*. Now it was in some places a wilderness of roses, while in others great clumps of hollyhocks or purple larkspur produced magnificent effects of colour. There were no formal beds, but the wanderer was ever stumbling on some unexpected beauty: here a rockery, sparkling with glittering spar, and covered with a rich wealth of rock-plants, there a spot of smooth turf with a stately cedar affording delightful shade, now a dell converted into a fernery, with a tiny stream tinkling and sparkling through beds of *Os-munda* and forget-me-not, and sprinkling with its bright drops the rare ferns that grew so well, and that were the pride of Mrs. Furnivall's heart, then a trellis-walk, arched with roses, ending in a summer-house covered with honeysuckle and clematis, and again a deep, still pool with waterlilies floating on it and a tiny fountain playing in the midst.

And everywhere the eye could turn there were flowers, not the geraniums and calceolarias, the lobelias and echeverias that ornamented the terrace gardens, but great bunches of the old English blush, and the York and Lancaster rose, Anne Boleyn and pheasant's eye pinks, clove carnations, clumps of the purple and the bronze iris, Canterbury bells, Marvel of Peru, larkspurs, lupins, and mignonette, all growing in the greatest luxuriance, and looking as if never curbed or restrained by the hand of art. Certainly the pleasure at Rookwood was far from being the least beautiful part of it.

Where the aloe might be situated Iris did not know, but, when Laurence led her down the arcade of roses into the honeysuckle covered summer-house, she realized it was not to show it to her that he had brought her away from her companions. For a moment there was silence. Now that it had come to the point, Laurence did not find it so easy to speak. The words he had so carefully pre-

pared were utterly forgotten, and he did not know how to begin. At length, the silence becoming oppressive and slightly ludicrous, Iris broke it.

"What a charming summer-house this is!" she said, admiringly. "But, Mr. Furnivall, I thought we came to see this wonderful aloe, and I do not see any trace of it."

"Never mind the aloe—just now, I mean. It was only I wanted to get you away from the others, to speak to you alone."

"To speak to me?"

"Yes. Look here," and Laurence rose and stood before her, "I am not a good hand at speaking; you know that as well as I do. We've known each other well now a long time. What I wanted to say to you is—I love you—will you marry me?"

"Yes, I will," said Iris, after the pause of an instant.

She was perfectly straightforward. She knew, had known now for some time, that she loved Laurence. He had just told her in

the plainest manner that he loved her. Why should she affect a coyness that she did not feel? If she had not been fully prepared to accept the offer which she thought was going to be made to her, she would not have been sitting in that bower, or have allowed it to be made.

Now that the momentous words were once spoken, Laurence recovered his usual composure and powers of speech: He had quite persuaded himself that he had been desperately in love with Iris ever since their first meeting, and did not pause to ask himself why, if such were the case, he had allowed five years to elapse without telling her so.

But Iris listened to him well pleased, and did not ask herself the question either. It was she who at length suggested that they ought to return to the house.

"We have been away too long as it is," she said; "the host is sure to have been missed."

"What does it matter? Everyone must know."

"But not to-day, Laurence."

"Why not? I want to tell everyone at once what a lucky fellow I am."

"But please wait till to-morrow. I haven't told mamma yet, and she must know first. And you must tell Mrs. Furnivall. Oh! Laurence, I hope she will like me, but——"

"Like you! She must be difficult to please if she doesn't. Why do you say 'but'?"

"Oh! I don't know, only I don't suppose she thinks there is anyone in the world worthy of you."

"That's absurd. Then you'd rather not announce it to-night."

"Much, much rather! I don't think I could bear it. If I have the chance I shall tell mamma."

"Well, I shan't tell my mother till the morning. I say, Iris, you won't mind, will you, my not coming over to-morrow to the Gate House to see you and Mrs. Pleydell? You see it's the

First, and I've got a lot of men here for the shooting, and——”

“I quite understand, Laurence, and so will mamma,” but, as she spoke a half unconscious feeling of disappointment came over Iris. To drive it away she rose, though Laurence's arm was still round her.

“We must go now, indeed,” she said. “It is getting quite late, and you must show me the aloe which we came to see. We are sure to be asked about it.”

They went accordingly, and, to Iris's not inconsiderable amusement, the aloe turned out to be a very fine yucca.

“Oh! Laurence,” she exclaimed, laughing, “fancy your not knowing your own possessions. Why, that yucca has been one of the sights of Rookwood for years!”

“You don't say so! Well, when I came upon it this morning, I made sure it was an aloe. I'm positive I never saw it before.”

“You must, though. But I’m afraid it won’t bring the good luck Lord Rootley predicted from the aloe.”

“Never mind, darling,” said Laurence, putting his arm round her waist and kissing her fondly. “It was the wish of my heart the aloe was to give me, and I’ve got it without, so it will do just as well.”

Iris had rather dreaded walking alone with Laurence into the whole party, assembled as they were pretty sure now to be on the upper terrace, as it was drawing on towards the time when the ladies would go in to re-arrange their toilettes previous to the collation and subsequent dance.

But as they walked on through the pleasure, and then into the Italian garden, they fell in with various groups all sauntering towards the house, and Iris took the opportunity quietly to detach herself from Laurence and to join some friends.

He had said to her just before,

“ You will give me the first dance ? ”

“ No, Laurence, the third. ”

“ Why, pray ? ” with a slightly offended air.

“ Because it is your duty to dance first with Lady Imogene and Lady Hildegarde. ”

“ But after what has happened, Iris. ”

“ It makes no difference to your duty as a host. Besides, you know you promised to say nothing to-night, and you might as well tell everyone at once. ”

“ Well, I suppose it must be as you like, ” and then they joined one group after another, and Mrs. Furnivall, anxious beyond measure at her son's lengthened disappearance, and expecting to see her worst fears realized by his coming back alone with Iris Netherleigh, was re-assured by seeing him come slowly up the steps engaged in a bantering war of words with Miss Calton, a young lady who had caused her very considerable uneasiness two winters before, but whose very existence Laurence seemed since to have forgotten ; whilst Iris made her appearance

some time after, walking with Lady Imogene and Sir Henry Mossman.

For a few moments Iris and her mother were alone in the room to which they had been shown.

“Mamma,” she said, putting her arm round her waist, and laying her head on her shoulder —“mamma, Mr. Furnivall—Laurence—has asked me to marry him, and I have said yes.”

“My darling! God grant you may be happy!”

“I am sure of it,” and Iris’s violet eyes shone like stars as she raised her head and looked at her mother. “And, mamma, I begged him to say nothing to-night; he wanted to tell everyone, and I—I felt I couldn’t bear it.”

“It is far better not, darling. But his mother?”

“He said he would tell her to-morrow. Oh! mamma, I hope she will like me.”

“She must be hard to please, dear, if she does not.”

“How funny! Those are the very words Laurence said.”

“*Les beaux esprits se rencontrent!* I suppose, darling, you don’t mind my telling Aunt Rachel?”

“Oh! no, dear Aunt Rachel of course. But, mamma, no one else, please—not even Eve.”

“My dear! I might as well tell the town-crier at once; she is such a chatterbox!”

“And, mamma, he said he hoped I shouldn’t mind, and that you wouldn’t either, his not being able to come over to the Gate House tomorrow to see me—and you. Because, you know, it’s the 1st of September and he has people here for shooting. I said I quite understood, and that I was sure you would understand too.”

“Of course, dear, if you are satisfied;” but Mrs. Pleydell’s thoughts flew back to the time of her first engagement, and she felt that Arthur Netherleigh would have left his shooting, even if the penalty had been that he

should never see a partridge again, rather than have asked her to excuse him.

Was she exacting, or did this man to whom her darling child had given the treasure of her young affection really not care for her as he ought? Would she with her warm heart, high intellectual powers, and tender, loving ways be only to him

“Something better than his dog,
A little dearer than his horse”?

If she believed it were possible! But, even if she did, Iris would not. Well, she was of course foolish to trouble herself unnecessarily. Of course his duties as a host did make a great difference. And, at this moment Eve came flying into the room, and between the assistance she required and her unceasing chatter, effectually put a stop to any more confidences.

But many times during the evening, as she watched her beautiful, eldest daughter, Mrs. Pleydell's doubts would recur to her, and they

were accentuated by the ominous "Humph!" with which Miss Netherleigh received the tidings of Laurence's excuse.

CHAPTER XII.

But love in whispers lets us ken
That men were made for us and we for men.

The Gentle Shepherd. RAMSAY.

But happy they, the happiest of their kind,
Whom gentle stars unite, and in one fate
Their hearts, their fortunes, and their beings blend.

Spring. THOMSON.

THE dance at Rookwood was not over till late. Mrs. Furnivall had watched her son during the evening, and had not been able to make up her mind as to his demeanour towards Iris. He had not danced with her often, for Iris was resolute in her determination not to do anything to enlighten the world as to what had passed between them; but certainly there was

something unusual in his manner towards her, and he seemed on remarkably confidential terms with Mrs. Pleydell: he had actually sat out one whole quadrille talking earnestly to her. Mrs. Furnivall did not understand it; she was uneasy, puzzled, tired, and decidedly cross, and when, after all the guests had retired, her son followed her to her dressing-room and asked if she could spare him a few minutes, it was with considerable impatience that she asked if it was anything so important that it could not wait till the morning.

“I’d rather do it now,” said Laurence, leaning against the chimney-piece and looking down at his mother, who, seated by the window, was leisurely divesting herself of gloves, rings, and bracelets; “everyone will be late in the morning, and I shall be in a hurry to get the men off for the shooting. I shan’t keep you long; I only want to tell you I am the happiest fellow in the world.”

Then the blow had really fallen! A conviction at once presented itself to Mrs. Furnivall

that Iris was not only, as she had before thought, unsuited to Laurence, but the very most unsuitable person he could have selected. She was determined not to help him in his announcement, and answered, quietly,

“I am very glad to hear it, I am sure. I suppose you found Lord Rootley sensible about the exchange of shooting.”

“I never once thought about it. No, it is something of much more consequence. Mother, wish me joy—I am going to be married!”

“I really cannot do that, Laurence, till I know who the lady may be.”

“Do you mean to say you don’t know? Well, mother, I thought you had better eyes. Surely you must have seen that I have never cared for anyone but Iris Netherleigh. Now you can wish me joy.”

“I do not quite know about that. Do you remember a conversation we had a little while ago, in which I said what a disadvantage it was to Miss Netherleigh to be connected with a fraudulent bankrupt? Even if I thought her

suited to you, which I do not, it would give me infinite pain that you should connect yourself with disgrace. You were aware of my feelings, and if you have yet chosen to act in defiance of them you can hardly expect me to be very enthusiastic in my congratulations on what I consider as a misfortune for you."

Laurence looked and felt disappointed.

"I'm sorry you take it in that way, mother," he said; "I expected you would have been delighted. Why, what more could you ask? Birth, beauty, and the best and most charming girl in the world! As to her being unsuited to me—well, that is my look-out, and I am quite willing to take any risk of it there may be; and as to disgrace, why, my dear mother, that is simple nonsense. Iris is not connected with the bankrupt; she does not bear his name—in short, she has nothing whatsoever to do with him. I can't think how you can make a mountain out of such a ridiculous mole-hill."

"Young people always imagine themselves wiser than their elders, I believe," said Mrs.

Furnivall, coldly. "Well, Laurence, have you any more to say? It is late, and I am tired."

"I want you to drive over to the Gate House to-day. I made Mrs. Pleydell and Iris understand why I couldn't go, but I promised you would."

"You should not make engagements for me without consulting me, Laurence. I have made arrangements to drive Mrs. Vane and Mrs. Dawson over to Lannermere."

"Well, mother, surely you can unmake them—you can go to Lannermere equally well on Monday. If you made an engagement to Mrs. Ablett, I will send one of the grooms over with a note; only do not refuse me this, mother, which I ask you with my whole heart. Go over to the Gate House, and be as charming as you know you can be to my darling Iris. I have promised that you will love her dearly."

"It is very bitter to me, Laurence—you, who with your position had but to ask and

have, who might have married anybody!”

“And what, pray, could I do better than marry the only woman for whom I have ever cared, the most beautiful and perfect woman it has ever been my lot to know? I suppose, mother, it is your affection for me that makes you so difficult to please, and that I ought to feel very much pleased and flattered, but I can't. I am no child now not to know my own mind, and no one should know that better than you. Tell me at once—I shall not ask you again—will you do what I ask? Will you go to the Gate House and welcome the sweetest girl in England as your daughter, or will you not? I must have a decisive answer. It will not make the slightest difference as to my determination, but it may make some as to the immediate course I shall pursue.”

“What do you mean?”

Mrs. Furnivall said this as a temporizing measure to gain a few moments' breathing span. Hitherto Laurence's will had never crossed hers, and she had hoped that a deter-

mined show of opposition would cause him to hesitate and procrastinate. But there was something in his tone and manner which, although she had never before noticed it in him, reminded her strongly of his father. Her husband, like his son, had generally acquiesced thoroughly in everything she wished, but on the rare occasions when their opinions had differed, it was always she who, much against her will, had been forced to yield. And now Laurence, whose disposition was, as she well knew, the counterpart of his father's, was standing before her, looking and speaking as his father had been wont to do in his most determined, or, as his wife called them, obstinate moods. Mrs. Furnivall felt she must ultimately give way, but she wanted a little time to arrange her thoughts, and therefore she asked,

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that if you refuse to do what I ask, what I have a right to ask of you, as the wife of my choice is a lady utterly and in every way

unexceptionable, I shall go there this morning, beg her to name the earliest possible day, next week if it can be managed, and bring her home here at once. Of course I don't want to do anything so unusual, but, if you won't do what I ask of you and receive her willingly, I must show her that it makes no difference to me. The Dower House can be got ready in a few days."

"You are very cruel, Laurence," said his mother, bursting into tears.

"It is not I that am cruel, but you that are unreasonable. I bring you the sweetest daughter-in-law heart could desire, a girl you have known for years, and of whom there is nothing but good to be known, and you affect to be dissatisfied, and talk nonsense about her being disgraced by the bankruptcy of her mother's brother-in-law. It is arrant nonsense, and you must know it is so. I had expected a very different welcome for my news. You have told me over and over again how much you wished to see me married."

"But I never expected this."

"Well, I could hardly have done better. At any rate, I have chosen and I shall not change. Will you do what I ask of you?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Furnivall, who knew her son well enough to know that it was of no use for her to struggle: "yes, I will go to-day."

"And you will be kind," he said, going up to her and laying his hand on her shoulder; "you will not let her guess that for some inscrutable reason she is unacceptable to you."

"No, you may trust me," said his mother, bitterly; "I will be as hypocritical as it is in my power to be for your sake."

And indeed, having to confess herself worsted by her son, Mrs. Furnivall had no thought of continuing the struggle. Finding Laurence determined, she had no wish to exhibit herself as ignominiously defeated, as would of course be the case if she suffered it to be apparent that she disapproved his choice, and yet he, as

would evidently be the case, persisted in it.

She had a passing thought of rousing Mrs. Pleydell's pride by manifesting her distaste to the marriage, but so highly did she esteem the honour done to Iris in being solicited to become the mistress of Rookwood, that she did not believe any amount of offended pride would induce either the girl or her mother to let such a chance slip away. So she made up her mind to make the best of what she could not help, and having made her excuses to the two ladies whom she had promised to drive to Lannermere, and dashed the hopes of one or two of the girls by the announcement of Laurence's engagement, set off in solitary state on her mission.

Mrs. Furnivall had a way of trying every house she entered by the standard of Rookwood, a method manifestly unfair on less stately mansions; but even she could not fail to be struck with the beauty of the Gate House

drawing-room when she was ushered into it. Perhaps she had never been there at a moment when the light was so perfect, or the garden so beautiful, or perhaps, which is more probable, she had never before looked at it so critically.

Be that as it may, she certainly was struck as she had never been before. The exquisitely carved oak was set off by curtains and cushions in the deep window-seats of tawny embossed plush, and the walls were adorned with one or two quaint and handsome mirrors. Flowers were everywhere, artistically arranged in bowls, vases, and shallow dishes, while in one corner stood an immensely tall vase filled with bulrushes and yellow flags, the stem wreathed with ivy and clematis. Passion-flowers and yellow roses surrounded the windows, framing the lovely view of the brilliant garden and placid river, with the rich water-meadows beyond dotted with clumps of trees and groups of cattle, and bounded by the blue Rockshire

hills. Mrs. Pleydell in her grey dress, and Iris in white with dark blue ribbons, looked well framed in such a room.

Whatever Mrs. Furnivall undertook she prided herself upon doing thoroughly, and there was certainly no want of graciousness in her manner.

"You expected to see me, of course," she said, as she shook hands with Mrs. Pleydell, and then, turning to Iris, she kissed her on both cheeks. "Laurence told me as soon as you were gone this morning," she said, when they were seated. "I confess I was surprised. I had noticed nothing yesterday."

"Iris was shy, and couldn't bear that it should be known last night," said Mrs. Pleydell.

"Very natural. Well, my dear Laurence tells me he has made his peace with you about not coming here to-day. It was good of you not to insist—it would have been awkward for our guests."

"Oh, yes, indeed, I quite understood."

"Laurence is fortunate," said Mrs. Furnivall, turning to Mrs. Pleydell; "but you will forgive a mother's partiality in thinking that Iris is equally so."

"I am sure I am," said Iris, before her mother could reply.

"Dear child, of course you think so, but indeed it is the case."

"I am glad to have known your son so long," said Mrs. Pleydell. "It will not seem so hard as giving my child to a comparative stranger."

"No, of course not," said Mrs. Furnivall, who felt indignant at Mrs. Pleydell's insinuation that it would be in any way "hard" to give Iris to Laurence. Hard, forsooth! As if she and the girl had not been scheming and plotting for this ever since Iris came out! She had no patience with such nonsense. But she suppressed her indignation, and said, "We want you and your daughters to dine with us on Monday. Our friends will still be with us."

“We shall be very happy.”

“Then I am afraid I must wish you good-bye. I must not leave my guests longer than I can help,” and, with another kiss to Iris, Mrs. Furnivall took her departure.

“She does not like it at all; she hates the thought of his marrying and of her having to leave Rookwood,” thought Mrs. Pleydell, as she sat musing after her visitor’s departure. “Still she is sensible enough to know that he was tolerably sure to marry sometime, and that he could not find anyone more unexceptionable than Iris. She was civil, but not cordial. I hope Iris did not perceive it—it would pain her. She would fancy that the objection was personal to her.”

But it was clear that Iris had perceived nothing.

“I am so glad that is over, mother,” she said, kneeling down by Mrs. Pleydell’s chair, and laying her head on her shoulder. “Somehow I fancied that Mrs. Furnivall did not like me, and would be sorry for what Lau-

rence had done, but, you see, nothing could be kinder than she was."

"It was only what you had a right to expect, dearest."

"But you can hardly have a right to be liked, mamma; loving and liking do not come of people's own will."

"Well, now you will have no objection to everyone knowing it."

"Oh, no, none—only somehow I felt I could not bear it last night. Mamma, let us go and see Aunt Rachel," and before long the two ladies were seated in Miss Netherleigh's drawing-room, where the scent of the roses and jessamine, the clematis and mignonette in the garden struggled with the faint odour of the pot-pourri in the tall china jars.

"Well, my dear," was Miss Netherleigh's greeting, "I couldn't wish you joy last night, but I felt for you none the less heartily."

"I am quite sure of that, Aunt Rachel."

"Well, young Laurence Furnivall is a lucky

man, luckier than, to my mind, he deserves, but you will not like me to say that."

"No, Aunt Rachel, and you won't think it, when you know him better."

"Well, well, child, it is all right that you should think him perfect. I could not wish it otherwise."

"Mrs. Furnivall has been over this afternoon, and has been so kind."

"She could not in decency be otherwise. It will be a bitter day for her, though, when she has to give up Rookwood, and come down to the Dower House."

"Oh!" cried Iris, flushing, "I had never thought of that. But surely she can go on living at Rookwood just the same."

"Don't talk nonsense, child. There can't be two Kings of Brentford, and no house ever answered where there were two mistresses. You needn't distress yourself in the least, Mrs. Furnivall has an excellent jointure, and a charming house all ready to step into. So I hear Master Laurence had the

bad taste to prefer the partridges to you to-day."

"It wasn't that, Aunt Rachel; but, you see, he had all his friends in the house for the shooting, and it would have been so awkward for him to desert them."

"Yes, yes, child, I know. What have you done with Eve to-day?"

"She has gone up to Beechmont to practise tennis for this tournament."

"What a fright that younger girl has made of herself! Don't let Eve see more of her than you can help."

"That is easier said than done, Aunt Rachel."

"I am going into the garden," said Iris. "Aunt Rachel, I may have some York and Lancaster roses, may I not? It is very odd no amount of persuasion will make them grow with us."

"Are you satisfied and happy about it, Gracie dear?" said Miss Netherleigh, as soon as Iris was out of earshot.

“Yes, Aunt Rachel, I think so. Iris would never have accepted him if she did not really care for him ; it really is not in her to think of his wealth or position, and he has evidently long admired her, it is no sudden fancy. So of course it is fair to suppose he knows his own mind.”

“You are certainly not enthusiastic, Grace. I wonder if anything would persuade Mrs. Furnivall that you are not absolutely delirious with joy at the successful issue of your machinations.”

“Aunt Rachel !”

“I was watching her here on Thursday. She hardly ever took her eyes off Iris. I am positive she was dying to tell Laurence that she was flirting with some one.”

“Iris has no more idea of flirting than——”

“Than you ever had, Grace. Eve’s talents in that line must certainly have been inherited from her father’s side of the house.”

“What puzzles me,” said Mrs. Pleydell, musingly, “is that Iris should have fallen in love

with Laurence Furnivall. I know there is not a word to be said against him, and of course, in a worldly point of view, it is an unexceptionable match; but—he is the last man in the world I should have expected to fascinate her. You know how intellectual she is, how fond of art and literature, and everything of the kind. Now I don't believe he would be able to tell the best water-colour of the year from a chromolithograph, or that he opens a book from one year's end to another. What attracts her? What can they possibly have in common? Of course I know it is not a case for my interference—Iris is not a child, and she has known him quite long enough to be acquainted with his tastes. But I own it completely puzzles me."

"My dear Grace, if you once begin to speculate on what makes people fall in love with each other, you will wonder without intermission to the end of your days. Surely you have seen enough of the world to know that it is always the most unlikely people in the whole

world who marry, and that what we fancy to be the most ill-assorted couples are often the happiest; it is a matter upon which there is really no reasoning."

"No, I know that. We are going to dine at Rookwood on Monday."

"Of course, that is as it should be. Was Mrs. Furnivall civil?"

"Ye-e-es. Civil, but not cordial. However, it satisfied Iris, and that is all that I cared for."

"She will try to put off the wedding in hopes that he may change. Don't be over-persuaded, Grace."

"I am in no hurry to part with Iris."

"Nonsense! You would part with her to-morrow if you thought it was for her good. What I mean is, don't let Mrs. Furnivall make a tool of you. You are terribly amiable, Grace."

"What an accusation! Come, Iris, Eve will be wondering if we are ever coming home to dinner."

After dinner Mrs. Pleydell told her younger daughter of Laurence's proposal.

"You don't seem at all surprised, Eve," she said.

"Surprised!" said Eve, with a laugh. "Why, I believe I first opened Iris's eyes to what was going on."

"What do you mean?"

"It was the first day we went to Miss Netherleigh's; after I came back, I asked Iris who the man was who put her into the carriage, and I told her he was awful spoons on her. She looked as if she were going to faint, and was as cross as could be."

Eve seemed to have enjoyed her afternoon thoroughly, and chattered merrily away about it and the Rookwood party, but in her secret heart she was very much surprised at herself. Not all the fun, fast and furious as it certainly had been, that she had had at Beechmont, nor the admiration she had excited in her sea-green dress at Rookwood, nor all the compliments she had received from her special adorers, Colonel

Leybourne and Sir Henry Mossman, could make her for a moment forget the stranger on the river—"Claud Esmond."

Claud Esmond seemed to be whispered in her ear by every breeze, and the handsome face and soft, dark eyes came between her and the men who flattered themselves that they were being so very fascinating to her. The pressure of his arm seemed never to leave her waist, waking or sleeping she seemed to feel his kisses, and she seemed to live a dual life, an outward one of fun and flirtation, and an inner one of love and passion. She almost shook herself in astonishment at being what she supposed must be really in love. She had tried hard that afternoon to throw cold water on a project for a boating-party on the following Monday; she had intended to go out alone that afternoon; of course she would not land—probably she should never do that again—but she should row up past the bower, and take a quiet look at it—and perhaps she might meet Claud on the river.

Had she had no other excitement, Eve would by this time certainly have persuaded herself that she was too desperately in love to be able to pass a day without a sight of Claud ; as it was, she had so much to amuse her that she had only time to wonder at the persistence with which she thought of her lover. There was no chance of her private expedition on Monday ; Hildegarde had been very determined, and the boating-party was to take place.

On the Sunday Laurence made his appearance in church, and walked on to the Gate House afterwards. He had been there very little, for he held morning visits in almost more than the usual masculine abhorrence, and the county was so sociable that he had constantly met Iris without sacrificing himself. He admired everything, declared the garden was prettier than Rookwood, and seemed to be altogether overflowing with happiness.

He stayed till he had hardly time to get home to dinner, causing Iris for the first time in her life to forget the very existence of the

Sunday School of which she was the mainstay. Indeed, when Laurence at length awoke to the lateness of the hour as they were sitting on the lower terrace, it was difficult to persuade her that they had been together more than half an hour.

Eve, to whom Sunday was rather a trying day, deprived as she was of the constant succession of afternoon visitors to which she had been accustomed in Hyde Park Gardens, complained mirthfully that the garden really was not large enough to hold a pair of lovers, that she and Mousse had wandered about in continual terror of falling over them.

Finding that her mother would not allow Iris's dog to be banished to please Mousse, Eve had contrived to pacify her spoilt pet, and a sort of armed neutrality had been established between him and Fuss, occasionally broken by some ebullition of Mousse's temper, when Fuss would quietly roll the little ball of white wool over on its back, and hold it there with one paw, wriggling, snapping, and doing its

best to extricate itself till he was called off by Iris.

“Mother,” said Iris, following Mrs. Pleydell into her room that night, “he is in a great hurry—he wants to be married at once.”

“Well, dear, that is only natural.”

“But, mother, he wants it to be in October.”

“And what did you say?”

“That I must ask you; but that it seemed startlingly soon.”

“Well, we will talk it over to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XIII.

Vessels large may venture more,
But little boats should keep near shore.

Poor Richard. B. FRANKLIN.

THE dinner at Rookwood went off well, but it was decidedly stiff. Mrs. Furnivall did and said all that politeness required, but no one who knew her well could have failed to understand that it was done *contre cœur*. Even Iris felt that there was something wanting, what she hardly knew, but it did not trouble her much. Laurence was so devoted that she had little time to distress herself about his mother's manner.

One very annoying method that Mrs. Furnivall took of showing her vexation was to refer everything ostentatiously to Laurence or Iris.

"It is not for me to decide now," she said, in answer to a question as to whether she intended to carry out some alteration in the garden which had been in contemplation at the time of the inquirer's last visit, "it is Miss Netherleigh's taste which must be consulted."

Causing Iris to blush painfully, and Laurence to feel that somehow his mother was not making herself pleasant, although her speech sounded fair enough to the ear.

"Iris," he said, when, the gentlemen having come in after dinner, he drew her out of the window on to the terrace, where the full moon made it almost as light as day, and the air was heavy with the scent of the flowers, "did you ask your mother about October?"

"Yes."

"And what did she say?"

"We have hardly talked of it yet. But, oh! Laurence, it seems very soon."

"Not half soon enough for me, dear. Surely, Iris, you don't want to wait? I should like to be married next week."

"Oh, Laurence, what nonsense!"

"Not a bit. I should like it of all things, but I know women can't be married without a lot of clothes and things. But I say, Iris, you won't put it off."

"You must talk to mamma, and hear what she says."

"I am coming to see her to-morrow, so you must talk to her before. And now I want to give you this. I quite forgot to bring it yesterday," and he produced a magnificent sapphire ring, set in diamonds.

"What a beauty! And it is my favourite stone," said Iris, when he had demanded and received payment for the gift.

"Yes, I know that. I heard you say so that day at Allanton, when Mrs. Vaughan showed you hers."

"How nice of you to remember! But indeed, Laurence, we ought to go in now."

"Oh, no! wait a bit. I say, Iris, every time I look at you you grow handsomer. I long to dress you up in all the family diamonds."

"Oh, hush, Laurence, they are your mother's."

"No, indeed! they are mine, and you are going to wear them."

"But indeed I am sure Mrs. Furnivall would like to go on wearing them, and I don't care."

"But I do," and a certain obstinate look came over Laurence's face which made him very much like his mother.

Iris saw that he was vexed, and hastened to change the conversation by some inquiry as to the probable time of his visit the next day.

"Eve will be overjoyed. She will escape her reading," she said, laughing, as he named eleven o'clock.

Indeed, when Eve heard, as they drove home, the time that Laurence had named, she at once exclaimed :

“How delightful ! Then, mummy, as you’ll be busy, and I can’t read to you, mayn’t I go and practise tennis ?”

“Well, yes, just this once,” said Mrs. Pleydell, whose mind was full of Iris, and who was not sorry that Eve should be out of the way while she had her quiet conversation with Laurence. She quite understood that he wanted to talk to her about business, and wished to be secure against inopportune interruption.

The boating-party had duly taken place on the Monday afternoon. Eve had done all she could to make Hildegarde choose to go down the river instead of up, but without avail, and they had gone farther than she had ever done, had passed the bower, and had, on rounding the next point, seen a charming cottage *orné*, which Eve at once knew must be where Claud was living. Indeed she fancied, though she

was not sure, that she saw his head at one of the windows. She was jubilant at her escape from reading the next morning. It would leave her the afternoon free, and surely Claud would be expecting her. She had had innumerable compliments on her improved rowing, had beaten Hildegarde easily, and had given Colonel Leybourne hard work, as he averred, to keep up with her. All arranged itself according to her wishes ; she resisted entreaties to stay and lunch at Beechmont, under the plea that she dared not do so without leave, which made Hildegarde pity and laugh at her for being so kept in order, and caused Lord Rootley to say, with a smile,

“It must be quite a new experience for you, Miss Pleydell, not to have everything your own way.”

Eve felt that she cordially hated him. He had once certainly admired her, and it had been a bitter mortification when he broke his chains, and she realized that none of her wiles would lure him back. Ever since she had always felt

uneasy when in his company ; she knew he disapproved of many of her proceedings, and always felt that she was being judged and found wanting. And this was pain and grief to Eve, whose vanity was insatiable, and who liked to have the approbation of everyone with whom she came in contact, so her feeling towards Lord Rootley was a very bitter one.

She rowed very rapidly up the river, but she had reached the eyot before her solitude was interrupted ; then she encountered Mr. Esmond.

“ Well, so you have left the rest of the flotilla at home.”

“ Yes, they are all gone for a ride in the forest. Did you see us yesterday ?”

“ You know I did—you saw me.”

“ I thought I did.”

“ You knew it, Eve. Come, we will land again to-day ; it is easier to talk there than here.”

This time Eve made no difficulties ; it seem-

ed so much easier now that she had once done it.

“Now tell me what you have been doing in the week since you were here.”

Eve recited where she had been, being sharply cross-questioned as to the names of her various partners, and the number of times she had danced with each; but, finding that Claud's brow lowered at every mention of Colonel Leybourne, she almost entirely suppressed his name, although she had danced with him more than anyone else.

At last, having talked sufficiently of herself, she communicated the intelligence about Iris.

“Furnivall of Rookwood. Is he a tall, fair fellow, rather good-looking, but quite a country bumpkin, who thinks of nothing but horses and dogs?”

“Except cricket and lawn tennis; he's a capital player, quite the best here.”

“So he's going to marry your sister. Well, he will have a very handsome wife.”

“Do you think Iris so *very* good-looking?” asked Eve, doubtfully. It seemed to her that admiration of anyone so utterly different implied a depreciation of her own charms. “She’s so tall, and then she’s quite old.”

“Old! you ridiculous child! What do you mean?”

“She is two and twenty,” said Eve, solemnly. “That is quite old if you’re not married.”

“Well, you see, she’s going to be.”

“Yes, it’s quite time. I should be awfully ashamed of not being married before I was twenty.”

“You little goose!”

He had his arm round her waist, and in the tone he used she had no objection to being called a goose.

“I want you to take me to see your cottage,” she said, presently. “It looked so pretty the other day. Is it your own?”

"No. I rent it from Sir John Dibbleton."

"What, the funny old man with the creaky shoes and squeaking voice, who lives on the other side of Bannerton? Well, it is very pretty. Now show it to me."

"Don't ask me, Eve, I—I really can't."

Eve pouted.

"You mean won't."

"No, I mean what I say."

"Oh! very well; if you won't do what I ask you I shall go home."

She tried to rise, but he held her fast.

"Eve, look at me," but she kept her face steadily averted.

He put up his hand and turned it round to him quietly but firmly.

"What a cross little face! Eve, I hope you don't often look like that. It spoils your looks, and will bring wrinkles in no time. I declare a crow's foot is coming at the corner of your eye already."

"You are so unkind," said Eve, pouting, but the scowl began to lighten.

"No, I am not. There, let me kiss the wrinkles away. You know, Eve, I would do anything for you."

"Except what I ask you."

"That I *can't* do. Eve, you mayn't care much for that worthy person Mrs. Grundy, neither do I except for you. Still it is never any use to offend her unnecessarily. Here no one ever comes, and no one is the wiser for our meetings, but at the cottage it would be different. Come, I'm sure you seemed anxious enough the other day that your mother shouldn't know of our meetings : you even suggested that I should array myself in the garments of civilization and call at Beechmont on purpose to be formally introduced to you. What chance, pray, would you have of keeping your secret if any of the servants saw you? You are not exactly a person to be mistaken or forgotten. Why, it would be all over Bannerton to-morrow morning."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Eve, reluctantly.

"By-the-by, while you have all your friends about, it would be better if you were to let me have a line to say when you will be able to come. I don't want to meet them."

"I can't think why; they are all so pleasant."

"Well, such is the case, I don't. Can you write?—I mean, can you post your letter unobserved?"

"Yes, I think so. There is a box a little way down the road."

"Well, direct—'Post-office, Marston.'"

"Why not to the cottage?"

"It is safer."

"Now I must go. I wonder if Iris and Laurence will have done spooning by this time."

"You find it pleasant yourself, do you not?" with a fervent pressure.

"Yes-s," said Eve, almost shyly.

"Well, then, don't grudge the pleasure to

others," said Claud, laughing. "Here," in an altered tone, "stand back a little, Eve; there are two fellows in the field opposite. How strange! I have never seen anyone about before. Just keep back in the summer-house till the coast is clear."

It was quite a quarter of an hour before he would allow her to emerge, and not then before he had carefully reconnoitred the opposite bank.

"I think it is all right now," he said, as he helped her into the boat. "It is a pity you had the boat made so conspicuous; there is no mistaking it."

For Eve had insisted on having her boat painted sky-blue, with a wreath of water-lilies round the top, in consequence of which she had the day before undergone a good deal of "chaff" from most of the Beechmont party.

"Are you not coming?" asked Eve, in a disappointed tone.

"Not to-day, pretty one. You see, if those two fellows keep on along the bank you must

of course pass them, and it is as well you should be alone."

"You are awfully cautious," pouted Eve.

"All for your sake. *Au revoir !*"

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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